KASHMIR

HINDU RELIGIOUS CULTURE



CHAMAN LAL GADOO

INTRODUCTION

Dr. MOHAN KRISHEN TENG

The book an attempt to provide the reader as well as researcher in Hindu religious culture, a systematic and indepth analysis of the religious culture of the Hindus of Kashmir, its philosophical content, its theological postulates, its theory of action and its ritual structure.

An important aspect of the study is to bring to surface, that the Hindus of Kashmir formed a part of the Saraswati-Sind Valley cultural continuum. In this respect, the book is the first of its kind. The study is neither cast in the histrographic scheme and the assumptions, which the colonial historians of India and their European contemporaries used to examine the Sanskrit civilization of India. Nor is the study based upon the reductionist methodologies, adopted by the post-Independence historians of India.

The Sanskrit religious culture of India enshrines the endeavour to lift the human form by its soul to merge with the absolute. The Hindus, wherever they are, worship the divine as it enfolds before them in manifold forms. The Sanskrit religious culture recognizes the essential unity between the universal and the existential. The Hindus seek communion of *Atma* with *Parmatma*.

The civilizational unity of India is symbolized by collective consciousness of their spiritual heritage. Kashmir has for ages been a part of the spiritual heritage of India. The ruins of the ancient temples in stone, strewn across the length and breadth of Kashmir are a mute testimony of the Hindu heritage. The book is an attempt to explore the past and present of the Hindu religious culture of Kashmir in that context.

Cover Photograph : Ruins of Datta Temple

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HINDU RELIGIOUS CULTURE

By
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With
Introduction
Dr. Mohan Krishen Teng

VIDYA GAURI PRAKASHAN
DELHI

To Dr. Kashinath Pandita, with respect and love

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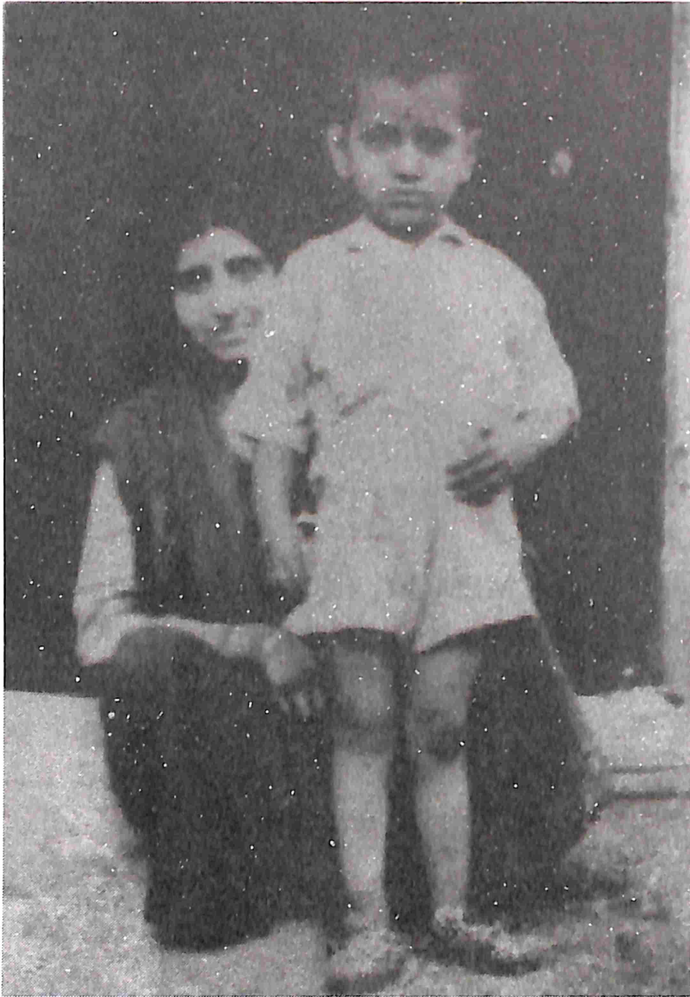
DEDICATED

To

THE MEMORY OF MY MOTHER
Smt. RAGNIYA GADOO

AND

TO THE MEMORY OF MY BROTHER
Sh. VED BUSHAN GADOO



MY MOTHER SMT. RAGNIYA GADOO

AND

MY BROTHER SH. VED BUSHAN GADOO

Contents

PREFACE

The present study is a systematic and in-depth analysis of the Hindu religious culture of Kashmir: its evolution from its Neolithic beginnings, its philosophic content, its theological postulates, its theory of action and its ritual structure. The Hindus of Kashmir, being a part of the people of Saraswati-Sind Valley cultural continuum, an attempt has been made to identify the Vedic foundations of their religious culture as well as its Upnishadic and Puranic linkages, which make an inseparable part of the Sanskrit religious culture of India. The study is aimed to provide the reader an insight into the religious culture of the Hindus of Kashmir and identify for the researcher, the aspects of the Hindu religious culture of Kashmir, which are still unexplored and which need further investigation and more in-depth enquiry.

In one respect, the present study on the religious culture of the Hindus in Kashmir is the first of its kind in so far as it is not cast, in historiographic schemes and the broad assumptions, which the colonial historians of India and their European contemporaries used to examine the Sanskrit civilisation of India. Nor is the study based upon the reductionists historiographic paradigms which were adopted by the post-independence historians of India. The Indian political class, which assumed power in India from the British, carried the burdens of their colonial past which compelled them to deny India the antiquity of its civilisation, the continuity of its history as the main bond of the unity of India and its civilisational frontiers. The present study is placed within the frames of reference which are Indian and Sanskrit in essence, derived from the geographical and historical expression of India and the spiritual experience of the Indian people.

The Sanskrit religious culture of India enshrines the endeavour to lift the human form by its soul to merge with the absolute. The Hindus, wherever they are, worship the divine as the divinity unfolds before them in its manifold forms. The Sanskrit religious culture "recognizes

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With reverence, I acknowledge the debt, I owe to Swami Lakshman Joo, the Shaivite saint and scholar upon whose works on Shaivism, books, lectures, discourses, I have drawn upon heavily. With respect, I acknowledge my indebtedness to Pandit Janki Nath Kaul 'Kamal,' upon whose books and works I have drawn heavily.

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5th JANUARY 2015 **CHAMAN LAL GADOO**

INTRODUCTION

The religious culture of the Hindus of Kashmir is an inseparable part of the Sanskrit civilisation of India. As a part of the Hindu religious culture of India, it has a civilisational context, geographical expression of a continent and a historical continuity spread over millennia. The Hindu religious culture encompasses the spiritual experience of the whole people of the sub-continent of India and goes back to its Vedic origins in the Harappan-Saraswati-Sind Valley, cultural continuum. The Hindus of Kashmir are the descendents of the ancient people whose remains were found at Burzahom in Kashmir, as well as Harappa, and the people who inhabited Mohenjo-Daro in the Sind Valley. These ancient people called themselves the Aryas—the people, who were characterized in the Rig Veda, as the people, who were noble, truthful, and ready to fight for the truth. They did not consider themselves as a race. In fact there is no evidence in the Hindu scriptures to suggest that the people of India right from their antiquity were acquainted with what is now defined as a race. Races and race-movement were Semitic concepts, which attained legitimacy in the western cultures and were in the nineteenth century scienticised by the growth of Anthropology, more specifically, the Physical Anthropology. India was the homeland of the people, the Aryas, who lived in India from their pre-historic past, dating back to their Neolithic—the latter stone-age-cultures and even earlier, as the latest archaeological excavations at Burzahom, in Kashmir, Birhana in Haryana and Mehargarh in Baluchistan, as well as many early mature Harappan sites, such as Rohira and Kunal suggest. Race movements into India and the division of the Indian sub-continent in separate racial cultures, was fabrication of the British historians of the colonial era and their European contemporaries. A travesty of the Indian history, it has been dealt with in more details in following pages.

The frontiers of the Sanskrit civilization extended over the sub-continent of India and beyond it far into the north-west, across the Caucasus; in the north across the Himalayas and in the south and south-east, across the seas into South-Asia and South-East Asia. The Himalayas and the regions beyond, were Sanskritized, by the Hindus of Kashmir. The script of Tibetan language as well as Mongolian language and several of its variants, in Central Asia, was evolved by the Hindus of Kashmir on the basis of the Sharda script, in which Kashmiri language was written. In the east and the south of India, the Sanskrit civilization spread from its earliest Harappan-Saraswati phases, deep into the Gangetic plains and in the south up to Narmada and Godavari.

How intricately inter-woven are the historical and geographical linkages of the Sanskrit religious culture of India, is brought to surface by the Godavari Mahatamya, written in Kashmir to narrate the spiritual significance of the Gudar Tirtha, which is situated in south Kashmir. Gudar is a small village in Kulgam District in south Kashmir, located at the foot of a hillock—the Gudar hill, a part of the Pir Panjal mountain range. There is a small spring above the Gudar village, amidst a groove of pine trees in which the water, gushing out from the rock-side of the hill, which is carved in the shape of the mouth of a cow, or a 'Gow Mukh' falls. The spring is called the 'Kund'. The 'Kund' is the Gudar Tirtha. The Godavari Mahatamya relates that Rishi Gautama propitiated Maha Devi, the consort of Shiva and requested her to make the holy water of Ganga available to him in Kashmir. Maha Devi made a gash in the hillside of Gudar and the water of Godavari river, as sacred as the water of Ganga, flowed out of the cleft, and collected in the spring. Nilmat Purana refers to Gudar Tirtha as one of the important Tirthas of Kashmir. The Tirtha is believed to have been founded in 2450—2500 BC, the time the Saraswati-Indus civilizations flourished.

The Godavari Mahatamya relates that the pilgrimage to Gudar spring is made every twelve years, starting from the first of the *Navaratra* of the month of *Chaitra* and ends on *Poranmashi* of *Chaitra*, the next year. The pilgrims reach the holy Kund from Gudar village. After offering prayers at the holy Kund and drinking its water, they make a *Parkrima,* circumbulation of the spring, and descend down the hill on the other side to reach the Sangam—the confluence of the stream of water flowing out of the Kund and the river Vishav, at the foot of the Gudar hill. At Sangam they take a bath and perform *Shradha* of their deceased ancestors.

The spiritual experience of the Indian people, right from the

beginnings of the Saraswati-Harappan-Sind valley cultural continuum, formed the basis of Sanskrit religious culture—providing it a universal and uniform content, not bound any limitations of time and space. There is no elemental divide in the Sanskrit religious culture of India which separates it from its pagan past. The Hindu religious culture does not have a pagan antiquity. It is continuity in history and a geographical expression, unbroken by any sectarian boundaries.

The Hindu religion, its precept and practice, belief systems and ritual structures, are basically Sanskrit in content and natively Indian. The essence of worship and the spiritual quest in the Hindu religion is the expression of faith in the unity of the spiritual and the human, and the expression of devotion, and symbolizes the will of the soul to merge with the universal—the absolute of which the human form is an inseparable and unalienable part as well as manifestation. The spiritual quest in Hinduism symbolizes the search for permanence of life and its libration from death and dispersal, darkness and ignorance; apathy given expression in the Upanishadic verse:

> *"From untruth lead me to the truth,*
> *From darkness lead me to light,*
> *From death lead me to immortality."*

The Indian past was unraveled by the British historians and their European contemporaries, right from the time the British set foot on the Indian sub-continent. Buried underneath the centuries of oppression, religious persecution and cultural attrition, which had virtually obliterated even the race memory, of the great and ancient civilisation that India was. Their claim to have discovered India was not misplaced. Indeed, the pioneering efforts of the British and the European Indologists, gave to the Indian people a sense of belonging to their incredible past, a realization of continuity of the history of India and its civilisational frontiers. The new spirit of freedom inspired the people of India to search for their roots in their past.

Methodological Faultlines

The first impact of the discovery of the ancient past of India and the rapid uncovering of its great cultural heritage and spiritual experience was spectacular. Thomas R. Trautman, a well known British historian and an Indologist exclaimed in wonder, "study of Sanskrit and Indian antiquities would bring a second renaissance to the west, as the study

of Greek learning has been the foundation of the first renaissance." The contemporary European scholars were no less impressed, as they dug up the Indian past to discover that India was the cradle of a civilization, which surpassed all that the west had known so far, about philosophy, art, religion, and theology.

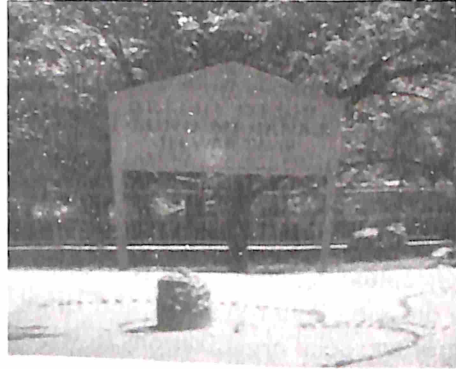
The study of Sanskrit did not bring a second renaissance to the west. It brought a renaissance to India. In a way, the British historians of India and their European contemporaries, who awakened the Hindus of India to their historical past, and brought to light their religious heritage, were in fact, the pioneers of the Indian renaissance. The Indian renaissance provided the Hindus not only in India, but wherever they were, scattered by centuries of religious aggrandisement, a sense of belonging to their civilisational past, recognition of the geographical boundaries of their ancient land and a consciousness of the continuity of their incredibly long history.

However, the British historians of India and their European contemporaries were caught in a time warp, natural for them, for they could not have come out of their age. Nor could they have come of the mind-set, they had inherited from their environment, their education, and the symbols, they were acquainted with. To study the oriental India, they had at their disposal methodological paradigms, which had their frames of reference in the history of the Semitic civilization, of which they were part and an expression. Their investigation and analysis of the Sanskrit civilization of India, as it unfolded before them, was mainly undertaken by techniques and tools of historiography which they had evolved in the west to read their own history. Their methodological models listed categories which represented the history of the Semitic civilization, its spiritual experience and material culture, which they had woven into an over-arching theory of historiography.



Seal of Pashupati—Mohenjo-Daro

The methodological models used by the British and the European historians of India, were mainly reductionist in content and severely restrictive in their scope. The assertion that "the institution of hunting, food gathering, harnessing and domestication of herds and animals was led by the male leader, who was according titled Pashupati—



Shrine of Jeevan Sahib—Lodov

the keeper and owner of herds," underlined a reductionist paradigm, which hid more of the Hindu India than it revealed. Sir John Marshall described the statuette on the seal found in Mohenjo-Daro as the "proto-Shiva," and claimed that the "horned god has much in common with Shiva of later Hinduism, who in his most important aspect, is a fertility deity and is known as Pashupati." Another celebrated English historian A.L.Bhasham added that "the horns of the proto-Shiva are evidently those of a buffalo." Neither John Marshall nor Bhasham, perhaps knew that the cap-like headgear depicted in Mohenjo-Daro seal, was used in the cooler regions of the northern India and it is still worn by the people in Ladakh and Kargil. A similar cap like headgear is preserved in the Shrine of Jeevan Sahib, at Ludov near Srinagar in Kashmir, among the other relics of the great Hindu saint.

Bhasham's comment on the historic origin of the Mother Goddess Bhavani of the Hindu scriptures was equally inaccurate and misplaced. He wrote; "The religion was of the type practiced by other early agricultural communities in the Mediterranean region and the Middle East, centering round fertility rites and the worship of Mother Goddess." In order to authenticate his thesis, Bhasham added; "They also made rough terracotta statuettes of women usually naked, but with elaborate head dresses. These are certainly the icons of the Mother Goddess and are so numerous that they seem to have been in every home."

The Marshall—Bhasham framework which was in no way different from the framework used by the other British and European Indologists, continued to determine the course of investigation and research in the Hindu religious culture for a long time. Few attempts were made beyond the methodological paradigms evolved by the British and the European historians of India, to look deeper into the Indian soil, to discover what lay hidden underneath its surface. Very few attempts were made even to look deeper into the work of the British and the European historians, at least, to identify the more obviously questionable a-priori propositions. The perfidy was hidden in the ambiguity, the

English language abounded in and in which the Indian historians who followed the British and the European historians of India, repeated what their predecessors had perhaps, not dared to write. Romilla Thapar, a celebrated Indian historian wrote; "The earliest religious ideas of the Aryans were those of primitive animism, where the forces around them, which they could not control or understand, were invested with divinity and personified as male or female gods." Animism was a conceptual construct, the British and the European historians fabricated to describe belief-systems and ritual forms of primitive tribal and early agrarian social organizations in which they included all oriental religious cultures. Partly it was the expression of their colonial outlook and partly their inability to grasp the subtlety of the Indian spiritual experience and the Indian intellectual response to the environment in which ancient India grew. Animism was too common place a term for the subtlety of the Rig Vedic hymn reads;

> *"There was neither existence nor non-existence, there was no atmosphere, no sky, and no realm beyond the sky. What power was there? Where was that power? Who was that power? Was it finite or infinite? There was neither death nor immortality. There was nothing to distinguish night from day. There was no wind or breath. In the beginning darkness was swathed in darkness. All was liquid and formless. God was clothed in emptiness. Then fire arose within God; and in the fire arose love. This was the seed of the soul. Sages have found this seed within their hearts; they have discovered that it is the bond between existence and non-existence."*
>
> Another Rig Vedic verse reads; *"Those who seek the God of truth, find him. He is generous to those who are generous to others; but he stops the greedy from getting what they want. Those searching for ancient knowledge which has been lost, find it. He guides and encourages all who strive to penetrate his mysteries; and stretches out their span of life."*

A more recent assessment of the Sind Valley Civilization, more or less based upon the British—European framework like that underlined by the work of Marshall and Bhasham reads; "So by 3000 BC. the Indus society had settled itself as a peaceful and non-combative prosperous trading and commercial society, with its cultural belief in productivity, identifying it to the human female fertility and reproduction, represented by Mother Goddess." The inference that a non-combative peaceful and prosperous trading and commercial society, "identified its cultural belief in productivity" with "human fertility and

reproduction represented by Mother Goddess," is inconceivable except in the context of the Semitic experience and its pagan past. The conceptualization of the mother as the Goddess in the context of the Sanskrit civilization is fundamentally a Vedic expression which is not in any way related to the pagan deities of the Mediterranean origin. The pagan deities of fertility were conceptually different identies, than the identity of the Mother Goddess Bhavani, which symbolized the continuity of life.

The insistence upon linkages between the Semitic religious forms of the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern social cultures with the evolution of the Indian religious culture and social cultures which underline the methodological paradigms, the British and the European historians of the colonial era adopted, did not have any scientific, empirical or logical justification. Ancient India was a universe of spiritual experience which went far back into time, and perhaps had grown out of its rudimentary tribal and primitive agrarian social context, where the people did not divinize their environment, but tried to understand it, compete with it, and even repudiate it as Prakrati. The renowned Indian archeologist S.R.Rao notes about Sind Valley Civilization; "The story of the rise and fall of the, Indus civilization is an epitome of man's struggle for conquering nature and building an integrated peace-loving and prosperous society".

Race Movements

Whatever the reasons the historians of the British empire in India, and their European contemporaries had, they believed that India, as a wide and vast geographical expanse, with fertile soil, hush green forests and abundant river waters, remained an un-inhabitated sub-continent, while the regions around it, spread along the Mediterranean and the whole of West-Asia, Eurasia and Central Asia, with whatever climatic conditions prevailed there, were so thickly populated that their spillover reached India to colonize it. They drew up a systematic map of the race-movements into India beginning with the arrival of the thick lipped, round headed Austroloid people, who were followed by the long headed or hyperdolic-cephallic people of the Mediterranean region, who in turn were followed by broad headed the western brachycephalic people of the Eurasian regions, also called the Alipinoides. The Alipinoids were followed by the not so long headed dolicocephallic white people the Aryans. The Alpinoids, they presumed, disappeared and got mixed up with the earlier arrivals in India, till they reached the north-east of India.

The race movements in India gave the sub-continent a texture of a multi-racial constellation of racial patterns which were in perpetual conflict with each other. To complete the mapping of the racial composition of the people of India, the colonial Indologists classified the people of India into:

(a) the "long headed, narrow nosed, slender Mediterranean type, found all over the ancient Middle East and Egypt."

(b) the proto-Austroloid people with a flat nose and thick lips, related to the Australian aborigines, typically represented by the bronze figurine of the Dancing Girl of the Sind Valley Civilization; and

(c) the latter racial type, represented by the bearded statile of the Sind Valley.

The Aryan invaders are believed to have swept through Baluchistan, into Harappan settlements, devastating them completely and pushing their people down south. Describing the Aryans invasion the English historian A.L.Bhasham wrote; "These tribes of invaders, no doubt, were the uncultured barbarians when compared to the Indus society, but were speedy and sweeping horsemen with the weapons of distant targeting like the bow and arrow, and means of stormy mobility and distant attacking rendered them victorious in disarranging the settled cultural society of Indus people." Bhasham wrote further, "The Harappan people were replaced by squatters, living in small huts with fire places, an innovation which suggested that they came from a colder climate." After having arrived in India the Aryan invaders settled in the Indo-Gangetic plains grew into the Vedic civilization—reducing the people of the Harappan India into the population of the Dasyus—the black aborigines, subjugated and segregated on the basis of their colour.

The race movements in Kashmir are believed to have taken place, more or less on the same pattern, as they did in India. Kashmir, it is believed was populated by aborigines, as usual, people of the Mediterranean region who had settled there earlier, perhaps as the glacial age receded. Known as the Nagas, they were joined by other aborigines of the adjoining regions. The Aryans are believed to have arrived in Kashmir sometime towards the end of the second millennium BC. One version of the race movements in Kashmir reads;

> "Thus the settlements of Nagas in Kashmir started during the Neolithic period; (2600 + 200B.C.), peaked around the beginning of the Megalithic period (16oo+200 B.C.), for nearly a thousand years. This period saw Daitiyas and Pisachas also

settling down in the valley, though in different directions and away from Naga settlements. The Aryan settlements again, like Naga settlements started around 1600+200 B.C. and peaked around 1300B.C."

Another version of the race movements in Kashmir based upon the dispersal of the, "long headed, narrow nosed, slender Mediterranean people of the Harappan settlements due to Aryan invasion and their migration to Kashmir reads; "It is obvious from the shelter finds of Burzahom that a chunk of Harappan men ventured to find their shelter in the safer confines of remote north with the pit dwellers and imparted their advanced knowledge for the horizontal settlements."

The discovery of India, the British historians and their European contemporaries made and the reconstruction of history of the ancient Indian civilization undertook, had a twofold impact. On the one side it awakened the Indian people to their civizational past, and gave them a sense of belonging to their lost heritage, leading them straight to seek their national identity. On the other side it evolved a response from the people which questioned several of the basic propositions, the colonial Indologists suggested as the basis of the Indian history. The most incisive and vocal among the Indians to question these propositions, including the race movements, was Aurobindo Gosh. He wrote; "So great is the force of attractive generalizations and widely popularized errors that the entire world goes on propagating the blunder talking of the Indo–European races claiming or disclaiming Aryan kinship and building on that basis of falsehood, the most far-reaching political, social or pseudo-scientific conclusions."

Nobody heard Aurobind. The Indian intellectual class bred up in the liberal-reformist tradition of the British Empire did not dare to break away from its reformist moorings. The leadership of the Indian national movement abandoned the Indian renaissance which had given the Indian struggle for freedom its ideological foundations, decades before the libration of India, from British rule

The Indian political class which rose to power in India after the end of the British rule followed in the footsteps of its colonial masters used the same instruments the British had used, which hardly left any space for independent research and in-depth study in the history and culture of ancient India. Research in history and culture of ancient Kashmir was more contained on account of the dispute it was involved on the basis of the claim, Pakistan lay to it. The Muslim political class,

to which the Indian leaders handed over power to rule the State, dispensed off the Sanskrit heritage of Kashmir as its pagan past and actually promoted a surreptitious campaign to establish the pagan character of the Hindu history and culture of Kashmir, more or less on the same pattern, the Indologists of the colonial India had done.

The initiative for a review of the history and culture of India, once again, came from outside the country. Towards the close of the twentieth century, researches and investigations carried on by the British, European and American historians, geologists, Anthropologists, linguistic experts and the archeological explorations carried on by the Archeological Survey of India under the supervision of renowned archeologists, brought to surface new facts about the ancient civilization of India, which upturned the old notions and concepts of the historians of the colonial India. The startling discovery of the dry bed of the legendry river Saraswati, the repudiation of the theories of race-movements in India, the identification of the Harappan-Saraswati and Sind Valley civilization, as a single cultural continuum and the evidence thrown up by the Burzahom excavations in Kashmir of the uniformity of the ethnic origins of the people of ancient India, have changed the entire course of investigation and research in the history and culture, specifically the religious culture of the Sanskrit India.

Vedic Age

The river Saraswati, which the Rig Veda venerates as the "*Ambitame*—greatest of the mothers," "*Naditame*—the greatest of the rivers," "*Devitame*—the greatest of the Goddesses," is no longer a legend. Geological and geographical as well as archeological inquiry has revealed that the river Saraswati flowed down from its source in the Shivalik hills at the foot of the Himalayas, touched the plains near Ambala in the Punjab, flowed through the Gaggar valley, in Haryana, through which a seasonal stream called Gaggar flows now, entered Rajasthan taking course parallel to the river Sind. The river then flowed into Cholistan desert, now in Pakistan, where it was called Hakra. From there, the river continued its course through Gujarat, and emptied its waters in the upper Rann of Kuch. The river Saraswati dried up, sometime around 1900 B.C., because of its main tributaries, Sutlej and Yamuna changed their course due to neo-tectonic movements along the axis of Aravali mountain range, former joining the Indus and latter joining the Ganga, leaving behind a clearly visible 1600 K.M. long dry

bed, three to twelve kilometers wide. At places in the Punjab and Haryana, the tributaries which join the stream Gaggar, are still called by the name of Saraswati.

The river Saraswati was the cradle of the Vedic civilisation, the culture of the Harappan people who were described as the Aryas in the Vedas. The Aryas were the original and indigenous people of India. Numerous archeological Harappan sites have been located along the courses of the dry bed of the river Saraswati and its tributaries in both India and Pakistan. There is hardly any doubt left of the Vedic nature of the Harappan civilization now.

Archeological explorations have revealed that the exclusiveness of the Harappan or the Indus Valley civilisation, of a people of a pre-Aryan ethnic origin, probably of a Semitic lineage, culturally closer to Semitic boundaries, was based upon assumptions and perhaps, pseudo-scientific untested hypothesis about race movements in India and their linkages with the evolution of the Indian culture. The Harappan people were the people who lived along the course of the river Indus and were identified by their stunning remains found at Mohenjo-Daro. The Indus valley civilisation too was a part of the Vedic civilisation. Saraswati-Harappan-Indus civilisation was a continuum, which after the drying up of Saraswati extended eastwards into Yamuna and Ganga plains, sometime before 1200B.C. The Harappan people spoke an earlier form of Sanskrit language as the noted archeologist Dilip.K. Chakrabarti writes; "The location of the epicenter of the Indus civilisation in the Saraswati-Drishdavati system is, according to us, a definite indication that this civilisation was speaking an early form of Sanskrit."

Not only the rediscovery of the lost river Saraswati ethno-graphic research, based upon most modern and scientific bases, has raised serious questions about the race movements in India and the identification of the cultural evolution of the Hindu India with the Aryan migration and the breakup of the people of India into a constellation of racial cultures in perpetual conflict with each other. The archeological exploration carried on by the Archeological Survey of India in Kashmir, the Punjab and Haryana have led to the discovery of new facts about the ethnic composition of the cultures that flourished in the north of India in ancient times. The excavations carried on by the Archeological Survey of India, over a number of Neolithic sites in Kashmir have unraveled facts which establish the ethnic affinity of the Neolithic—later Stone Age people, whose skeletons were found at Burzahom in Kashmir and the people of the Harappan culture—who lived along the

banks of the river Saraswati.

Burzahom is situated on the fringes of the Srinagar city in Kashmir. Archeological excavations carried on at Burzahom have revealed Neolithic, later Stone Age, settlements dating back to the third millennium B.C. The excavations have revealed a threefold cultural sequence; the later stone-age level succeeded by the Megalithic and the early historical cultural levels. The Neolithic people of Burzahom lived in dwelling pits over which thatched roofs were erected. Stone tools, bone tools and pottery, including handmade pottery, were unearthed at the site besides human skeletons, found in burial places under the pits. Detailed anthropometric examination of the skeleton remains of Burzahom revealed that the skeletons possessed morphological features, which placed them in the people of the dlolico-cephalic, proto-Aryan ethnic stock, who were living in the larger part of India, particularly in the north and whose descends continue to live there even now.

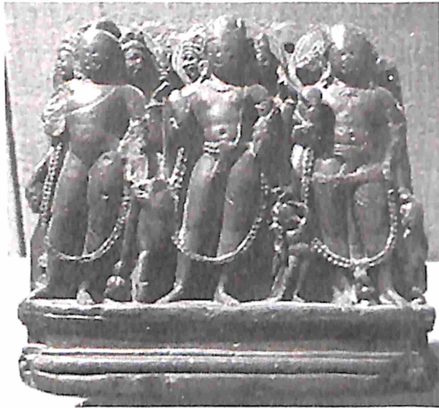
The examination of the skeletons found at Burzahom by expert teams of the Anthropological Survey of India, has brought to surface important facts about the ethnic origin of the people, who lived at Burzahom as well as the Saraswati-Indus Valley cultural continuum, The findings of the Anthropological Survey of India about the ethnic continuity of the people who lived in Kashmir and who lived along the Saraswati river and the river Indus, have negated the theories of race movements, including the Aryan invasion of India. Fresh ethnographic research and mapping of the people have, in fact, negated all notions of the plural racial composition of the people of India and established the racial affinity and continuity in the people living all over India. Michel Danino in his illuminating paper on the Indian race movements, "Genetics and the Aryan debates" admits that genetics, has laid the basis for a different perspective of Indian populations, and it is most unlikely we will have to abandon it to return to the crude racial nineteenth-century fallacies of Aryan invasion and Dravidian autochthons. Neither have any reality in genetic terms, just as they have no reality in archeological or cultural terms. In this sense, genetics is joining other disciplines in helping to clean the cobwebs of colonial historiography."

Kashmir was located close to the people living along the banks of Saraswati and Indus. The excavations carried on by the Archeological Survey of India in Jammu have found evidence of Harappan settlements on the banks of the river Chenab at Manda near Akhnoor bringing the Vedic civilisation close to, what are now called the Sanskrit Himalayas. Excavations carried on by the Archeological Survey of India in 2003—

2006, at Bhirrana, a Harappan site in Fatehabad, Haryana, have led to the discovery of "underground dwelling pits, house-complex on streets a fortification wall, bichrome pottery, terracotta cups, arrow-heads, fish boots, and bangles—all in copper, incised copper Celts, terracotta toy cots and animal figurines and beads of semi-precious stones." The early Burzahom people lived in dwelling pits. A rare discovery made at Birhana was that of a red potsherd with an engraving of a dancing girl, resembling the 'dancing girl' found at Mohenjo-Daro, which provides evidence of the contact between the Saraswati and Sind valley civilisations.

Archeological excavations at Burzahom, Kanispur and Gufkral in Kashmir, has thrown up evidence of close contact between Kashmir and Harappan culture. B.R. Mani, in his paper presented at an international Seminar, held at Lucknow in 2000, notes; "Recent excavations at Kanishkapura (Kanispur), in Kashmir have pushed back the antiquity of Kashmir ceramic Neolithic to the last quarter of the fourth millennium B.C. on C-14 determination. This period is contemporious with Kot Dijan phase, which has now been traced at Harappa also, which contains representation of typical 'horned deity' on pots, a feature common to so many early Harappan sites, which is significantly represented at Burzahom. Dish on stand, perforated jar and such other ceramics, carnelian beads, blades on semi-precious stones, and such other features are common to both Harappan and Kashmir Neolithic and suggest at least the cultural contact between the two from the fourth millennium B.C. onwards. The evidence of copper-bronze objects of Kashmir follows essentially, in late Neolithic phase at Burzahom, Gufkral and Kanispur suggest a long interaction between the Harappan and Neolithic cultures. Evidence of pit dwelling polished tools, some traits of Neolithic have been noticed at early and mature Harappan sites, such as Rohira, Kunal and Birhana."

Kashmir was the home of the people described by the Rig Veda as the Aryas, the people who inhabited the whole of the Vedic, geographical expanse across India. It is established now by latest scientific investigations that there was no demographic disruption during Harappan age. The Harappans were by no means the people of the West-Asian stock who were pushed down south by the Aryans invasion to constitute the Dravidian south of India. The noted American Anthropologist K.A.R.Kennedy notes;"In short there is no evidence of disruption in the north-western sector of the sub-continent during and immediately after the decline of the Harappan culture." The Nagas, the Pisachas and Daityas, who are believed to have lived in Kashmir before



Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu
(8th century stone Sculpture, Kashmir)

the arrival of the Kashyapas, were also a part of the people, described by the Rig Veda as the Aryans, perhaps, distinguished by regional or cultural variants. The Kashmiri language is a derivative of an earlier form of Sanskrit, perhaps, of the same Vedic origin as other Indian languages are, has been proved beyond doubt by the research of Triloki Nath Ganjoo, a Sanskrit scholar of Kashmir.

The beginning of the religious culture of Kashmir can be traced to the cultural milieu reflected by the Rig Vedic tradition. No researches have been conducted in the course and the extent of their evolution within the broad geographic combine and the assimilation of the Neolithic culture forms in the Sanskrit religious culture which emerged, obviously after the induction of metal in the Kashmir Neolithic, from its Harappan surroundings, towards of close of the early Harappan or the beginning of the mature Harappan age. The Vedic culture of the Saraswati-Indus civilisation reached a high level of sophistication, which included a defined Puja *Paditi—form* and procedure of worship of Gods, Mother Goddess, *Lingam*, fire God *Agni*, sacrificial offerings to *Agni*, and so on. The substratum of the religious culture of the people of Kashmir must have been laid out as the Saraswati-Indus civilisation flourished, The ritual structure of the Hindus in Kashmir, corroborates with the Vedic ritual structure later composed in the Vedic Kalpa Sutras and the Grah Sutras. There is evidence that the Hindus in Kashmir were aware of the Nakshetra Calendar, which was without any doubt a Harappan creation. The Saraswati or the Harappan tradition evolved across four millennia of unbroken continuity till the Saraswati began to recede and was finally lost close to 1900 B.C. This incredibly long period of history, saw the Vedic religious culture mature in Kashmir.With its basic structure laid down, it was integrated in the broader Hindu religious culture as it evolved through the post-Vedic era the Upanishads, the Brahamanas and the Puranas.

The Nilmat era of the history of Kashmir, began with the chalcolithic revolution in Kashmir brought about by the induction of

metal tools from its Harappan surroundings. Hardly any studies in Kashmir have been undertaken in the changes in the material culture and the society of Kashmir after its entry into the chalcolithic or the metal age. Nor have any studies been undertaken in the direction, the growth of the religious culture assumed in Kashmir, or identify the impact of the great developments in the intellectual culture of the Vedic India, which are reflected in the Puranas. By the time of Mahabharata war, Kashmir had reached high level of social integration and perhaps formed one of the Jan Pads in the north of India. The Nilmat Purana provides evidence of Kashmir having reached an advanced level of cultural development due to the absorption of influences of the cultural evolution of the Vedic civilization and its entry into Puranic era. In fact, the Nilmat Purana is a Vaishnavite text. The Mahatmayas, of which a large number were written in Kashmir, provide a wide range of the fact and data about the evolution of the Sanskrit religious culture of Kashmir, its basic Vedic foundations, and its philosophic, mythological and the ritual content which assumed from the Upanishads, the Brahmanas, the Puranas and the Dharma Shastras. At the level of abstract theorization, the religious culture of the Hindus of Kashmir is a part of the human quest to overcome the inability of man to know causal factor, or factors of the imperfection of his being, impermanence of his life, his inability to reconcile with his surroundings and his urge to attain freedom to merge with the absolute, perfect and permanent—in his life or after life. The Sanskrit religious culture recognizes the essential unity between the universal and the existential, rationally or otherwise.

Untold Story

The disruption of the evolution of the Hindu civilisation with the rise of the Muslims to power in India has largely been left out of scrutiny of the British historians and their European contemporaries as well as the Indian historians, who followed them, for their own reasons. The historians of the British colonial era, after they realized the revolutionary import of the Indian renaissance turned the bend to placate the Muslims whose domains in India they had usurped and whose express anger against the Indian renaissance and hostility against its revolutionary import, they needed to rely on, to perpetuate their colonial hold on the sub-continent. The Indian historians followed the British, while they rule, India and after the British left India, followed the political class,

which inherited power from British and continued to adhere to the policies of their colonial masters to hold on to their power and position. Neither, during the British rule nor after it ended the story of the disruption in the evolution of the Hindu civilisation, brought about, by the Muslim conquest of India, has been ever assessed and recorded. No investigation and inquiry has been made of the devastating impact the Muslim rule had on the Sanskrit religious culture: the very spirit of the unity of India, the degeneration and the disintegration the Hindu social organization suffered and the breakdown of the civilisational boundaries of India, the Muslim rule brought about.

Kashmir, a Hindu kingdom, which had touched the pinnacles of glory under the Karkotas and later the Utpalas, extending its territories, north and east as well as west, and which had become a major military power in the north of India, passed under the Muslim rule early in fourteenth century, when a Tibetan fugitive, Rinchen seized the throne of the kingdom. Rinchen was supported in his struggle for power by Shah Mir, a Muslim adventurer and soldier of fortune, who had taken service in the kingdom of Kashmir, and had risen to power and position, with the patronage of the Hindu kings.

Rinchen, after he had seized the throne, embraced Islam, evidently, under the influence of Shah Mir, whose support he needed to consolidate his hold on the Hindu kingdom. A concocted story about Rinchen's conversion has been in vogue for a long time, which has entered some books on the medieval history of Kashmir that he was refused admission to Hinduism, which he had supplicated for, after which he had accepted Islam and become the first Muslim ruler of Kashmir. Perhaps the concoction is based upon a comment made by Jonraj in his Raj Tarangini, that, "One Deva Swami had scruples in initiating Rinchen to Shaivite faith. The refusal was made because Rinchen happened to be Bautta by birth." Deva Swami was a Shaiva Acharya and Shaiva Acharyas did not admit of any reservations of birth to admit Buddhists to practice Shaivite faith, because Shiva Acharyas were Hindus and Shaivism, a school of philosophy, in Hinduism and not a faith in itself. Rinchen was a Buddhist and there were many Buddhists who came from the northern regions to Kashmir to take instructions in Shaivism, Buddhism, and Vaishnavism etc. More importantly, conversion from one faith to another was unknown to Hindu religious culture. Conversion was a Semitic concept. As a Buddhist, he need not have converted to Hinduism, because he did not need to convert himself to Hinduism to practice Hindu faith.

Rinchen took the decision to embrace Islam for his own political interests, to keep Mir Shah, who had assumed formidable power in the Hindu kingdom, on his own side. Baharistan-i-Shahi, a Persian work, written in 1614 AD, and recently translated into English, by Dr.Kashi Nath Pandita, a noted Persian scholar and an expert in Central Asian Studies, reveals the truth. Baharistan-i-Shahi narrates; "At this time only a handful of people in Kashmir have embraced Islam. Most of the people were infidels or dissemblers. But when Rinchen thought of embracing a religion, and associating himself with a community, he made enquires about the principles and laws of their religion from the savants among the infidels and the learned men of the times. They beseeched him to join their fold. The Muslims also put before him, the principles and teachings of the Islamic faith and invited him to embrace their religion. But owing to serious differences among the two religious groups, and the disagreement prevailing among the two religious groups he was not able to reach any decision. Each community considered its religion the true one and each group induced him to embrace its religion. He was in a fix because of the serious differences and glaring contradictions in the views of their communities. Their heated discussions and discourses led him to no satisfactory conclusions. However, blessed as he was with a dispensation for justice, for 'God helps those who help themselves,' he found the right path. He firmly decided that he would embrace the religion of the first man; he would meet in the street after coming out of his house the next morning. He also decided to join the community to which the man belonged."

Baharistan-i-Shahi notes further; "Next morning he came out of his house. The rays of the sun of divine guidance, bringing every object from darkness to light, librated him from darkness of ignorance and disbelief; for all of a sudden, in the neighborhood of his mansion, he saw a *Darvish* offering *Namaz* (the Muslim way of praying), with full devotion. He went towards him, when the *Darvish* had finished his prayer; Rinchen held him by the hand and brought him to his house. Then he called on an interpreter who knew his languages." After having asked the Darvish his name and his religion, he was told by the *Darvish* his name was Bulbul Qalandar and his religion was Islam, and that he was a member of the sect of Shah Nematullah Wali of the Shia sect. There upon Rinchen embraced Islam and became the first Shia Muslim ruler of Kashmir assuming the name of Sultan Shams-U-Din.

Rinchen's death after a short spell of his rule over Kashmir plunged Kashmir into turmoil. The Damara war lords, who had ravaged

the country so far, restored the Hindu claimant, Udhyan Deva to the throne. Rinchen had married Kota Rani, the daughter of his benefactor. Udhyan Deva took her as his queen. Udhyan Deva an imbecile, died after a rule of fifteen years of misrule, leaving the reins of his administration into the hands of Queen Kota. Taking advantage of the continued unrest in the kingdom which the feudal batons spread, Shah Mir seized the throne and laid down the foundations of the Sah Miri dynasty.

The story of what happened to the Hindus and Hindu religious culture in Kashmir, during the rule of the Shah Miri Sultans and the Chaks, Mughals and the Afghans, who followed them, has not been told. The British historians and their Europeans contemporaries, who awakened the Hindus of Kashmir to their Sanskrit past and retrieved whatever was left of their Sanskrit heritage from the centuries of oppression and religious persecution, which they were subject to during the Muslim rule. They carried archeological studies to identify their temples, which lay in ruins strewn around all over the ancient kingdom. They located whatever of the Sanskrit books and records had escaped destruction and recorded their oral traditions, which the Hindus, who had survived the holocaust had passed on from generation to generation, including the valuable Vakhas of the Hindu poetess Lalli Shori, who lived through the early phase of Muslim rule in Kashmir. But they followed the same policy in Kashmir that they followed in India to avoid any inquiry and investigation into the destruction and devastation, the Muslim rule brought to the Hindu religious culture in the Hindu Kingdom of Kashmir.

The Indian political class which rose to power in India after the British left followed the same policy; they followed in rest of India—not to tread the forbidden ground. Till recently, no attempts were made to even translate the Sanskrit accounts of the Muslim rule left by Jonraj, Shrivar, Prajya Bhat, Shuka and the Persian records of the Muslim historians and Muslim missionaries, who came to Kashmir after the establishment of the Shah Miri—Sultanate. The Muslim rulers and the lay and clerical officials of their state along with the Muslim missionaries, who came to Kashmir from outside, spread their faith with iconoclast zeal, leaving no stone unturned to demolish the Hindu religious culture. The Hindu historians wrote in difficult, fearful and inhospitable times. Jonraj portrayed the devastation, the Hindus suffered in the Muslim rule in muffled words, when he lamented that Muslims fell upon the Hindus and their culture in Kashmir, as the hosts of locusts fall upon the paddy fields.



Tappar Temple Ruins

The Sultanate and its successor Muslim regimes; the rule of the Chaks, the Mughals and the Afghans—all committed to the spread of Islam, adopted all means to exterminate the infidels and obliterate all vestiges of their religious culture. The Shah-Miri Sultans mounted a multi-pronged assault on the Hindus and their religious culture no sooner they had consolidated their hold on the Hindu kingdom. Baharistan-i-Shahi, records about Sultan Shahabudin, Sah Mir's grand-son and the third ruler in succession after Shah Mir: "Towards the fag end of his life, he was infused with a zeal for demolishing idol houses and destroying the temples and idols of the infidels. He destroyed the massive temple at Beejeb Belarh, (Bijbehara). He had designs to destroy all the temples and put an end to the entire community of infidels. But death overtook him in the year A.H.780 (A.D.1378)"

The means that the Muslim rulers and the Muslim missionaries who swarmed into the Hindu kingdom after it was brought under the Muslim rule, adopted the following measures to put an end to idolatry infidels and non-believers;

(a) forceable conversions to Islam;
(b) demolition of their temples and religious shrines;
(c) destruction of their places of religious intuitions, libraries, their scriptures, other religious books and records etc.
(d) imposition of prohibition on their religious practices, performance of rituals, including the cremation of their dead and immersion of the ashes of their dead in rivers and lakes, their festivals and their pilgrimages.
(e) imposition of Jazia—tax on all infidels and non-believers, for the protection from the Muslim state to which all Dimis or zimmis the "inferior people or Semi-slaves."

The ruthlessness with which the Muslim rulers of Kashmir dealt with the Hindus and their religious culture, is portrayed vividly by the

account left behind by the Muslim chroniclers of the times in the Persian language. Writing without any reserve upon them, their narratives were frank and forthright, vividly describing the extermination of the infidels, the destruction of their temples and the elimination of the evil practices of idolatry, heresy and polytheism. The destruction of the Hindu temples in Kashmir began with the early Sultans. Temples were demolished whatever the Muslim rulers or the Sayaids, the Muslim missionaries bid them to do so. But a concerted and organized campaign of the conversion of the Hindus and the destruction of their temples began with the reign of Sultan Sikandar, known as the But-Shikan—the iconoclast, who destroyed as many of the temples as his resources could allow, offered the Hindus three alternatives;

(a) embrace Islam;
(b) accept death; or
(c) leave the kingdom.

Hundreds of thousands of Hindus were killed, thousands of them left Kashmir and went into exile and the rest were converted to Islam. Another Persian chronicle, Tohafatul-Ahbab, which was also translated by Dr. Kashi Nath Pandita records; "In accordance with the guidance instructions of Amir-e-Kabir, this religious-abiding ruler became the instrument of strengthening the religion of Muhammad and the community of Mustafa. He brought prosperity and embellishment to the faith of the Prophet. He razed to ground all the idols houses in his country. The idols of the infidels and the customs of the (*Kafirs*) community of infidels, and of vices, aberrations and oppressions of the heretics (*Zandiq*) were abolished. He ordered the infidels and the polytheists to leave the country. For breaking and destroying the idol houses, temples and idols, he is known by the title of Sultan Sikandar, the iconoclast (But-Shikan)."

The persecution of the Hindus continued unabated during the successors of Sikandar. A hundred years later, the chronicler of Baharistan-i-Sahi wrote of his contemporary times, how another Muslim missionary Mir Shamas-ud-Din Iraqi, a Shia divine of western Iran, who had come to Kashmir, to spread the faith of Islam carried out the task of conversion of the Hindus with the help of the chief Wazir, Malik Musa Raina, of the ruling Sultan. Baharistan-e-Shahi narrates; "With the support of some more kings, the infidels had flourished day after day, but the support and authority of Malik Musa Raina, Mir Shams-ud-Din Iraqi, undertook a wholesale destruction of those idol houses as well as the total ruination of the very foundation of infidelity and disbelief. On

the site of every idol house, he destroyed; he ordered the construction of a mosque for offering prayers after the Islamic manner. The idolatry and heresy which had existed prior to his coming to this place were effectively replaced by his preaching and propagation of Islamic laws and practices. He brought honour to all infidels and heretics (*Zandiq*) of Kashmir to admitting them to the Islamic faith and bestowed upon them many kinds of rewards and benefactions. It is publically known as emphatically related that during his lifetime, with the virtuous efforts and elaborate arrangements made by the fortunate Malik Musa Raina, twenty-four thousand families of staunch infidels and stubborn heretics were ennobled by being converted to Islamic faith. It is difficult to compute the number of people who had hitherto indulged in corrupt practices of a wrong (false) faith and dissent and were put on the right track under the guidance of Mir Shams-ud-Din Iraqi."

In a footnote appended to his translation of Baharistan-e-Shahi, Kashi Nath Pandita writes; "It is recorded in Tohafatul-Ahbab, that on the instance of Shamsud-Din Iraqi, Musa Raina issued orders that every day 1,500 to 2, 000 infidels be brought to the doorsteps of Mir Shamsud-Din by his followers. They would remove their sacred thread (Zunnar), administer *Kalima* to them, circumcise them and made them eat beef." What was done to those who refused conversion is not mentioned.

Baharistan-e-Shahi narrates one of the events of how the chief Wazir Malik Qazi Chak of the ruling king, ordered the mass massacre of Hindus at the instance of the Saiyads. It records;"Since the above mentioned Malik (Kaji Chak), prior to his assumption of power and authority had promised him that he would never deviate from or disregard his wishes and injunctions and therefore, in deference to his wishes, he held consultations with his councilors and administrative officers, and decided upon a whole-scale massacre of infidels. The massacre was scheduled for the day of the approaching '*Ashura*.' Thus in the year A.H.924 (A.D.1518), during the *Ashura* about seven to eight hundred infidels were put to death. Those killed were the leading personalities of the community of infidels at that time, men of substance and government functionaries. Each of them wielded influence and sway over a hundred families of other infidels and heretics. Thus the entire community of infidels and polytheists in Kashmir was coerced into conversion to Islam at the point of the sword."

Tohafatul-Ahbab is full of the detailed description of the demolition of the Hindu temples in Kashmir. Hardly any temple was spared from

destruction. The description of the Hindu shrine Shiva-Vijayeshwara, situated in the present day Vijabror in south Kashmir, is recounted here, to show, the continuity in the process of the demolition of the Hindu temples over centuries. Tohaftul-Ahbab relates the grandeur of the temple which it describes; "had no parallel in its beauty and artistic splendor," with its top "capped with rising pinnacles." Sikandar, the Iconoclast, got the pinnacles removed and carried to the city, where they were placed, "on the four well known structures of the city." Tohafatua-Ahbab notes; "one was put atop the Jamia Masjid, second atop the hospice of Amir Sayyd Ali Hamdani, the third on the top of the cupola of Sikandar's tomb and the fourth atop the palace of Sultan Sikandar in Hairan Bazaar."

A century later, the Muslims, lay as well as clergy, accomplished its complete destruction. Tohafatul-Ahbab note; "Shams-ud-Din Arake came to that place in person and saw the demolition of the temple. The foundations of the prayer house of the infidels were demolished and the stones were brought to the city, where these were used to build the boundary wall of the Hamdaniyyeh hospice. A splendid mosque was raised in the place of temple."

The author of Tohafatul-Ahbab writes; "Shams-ud-Din Iraqi began his enterprise (of destroying temples) with the temple at Kohi-Maran, (Hari-Parbat hillock)." Hari-Parbat is the most sacred of places of the Hindus in Kashmir, at the top of which was a mighty temple, where Hindus worshipped. The temple was demolished. Tohafatul-Ahbab records; "A prayer house of the infidels existed at the place. Its foundation was dismantled and the idol house was set on fire, till it was fully consumed in flames.

About the demolition of the Hindu temples the author of Tohafatul-Ahbab, a local Muslim who calls himself Mohammad Ali Kashmiri, notes; "Hazarat Amir Shamsd-u-Din took great pains in breaking idols and smashing statues. He succeeded in his mission, Islamic faith and the laws of religion were strengthened (in Kashmir). The number of idol houses (temples) of the infidels in this land was so large that one could not give a full account of them. My pen is helpless in counting each of these. I, therefore, pull up the reigns of my pen at this point and leave the count and account of demolition of temples by Araki at this point although one is unable to make the count."

Amir Shams-ud-Din Iraqi carried his campaign of conversion to every village and every Hindu home. The author of Tohafatul-Ahbab narrates; "when Araḳi accomplished mission of converting people and

training and guiding them in the new faith, he addressed the task of converting and guiding womenfolk. Pious, puritanical and honest and trustworthy dervishes (retainale of the Sufis) and Sufis were selected and the task assigned to them. They were sent to all villages, localities and towns. Infact, they reached each and every house. When they came to a homestead, they would get hold of the cow belonging to the house keeper, kill it and sit down to eat beef in the company of the womenfolk and family members. Along with this they administered the recitation of *Kilma* to the womenfolk of the household and taught them the basics of Islam. Distinguished vice-regents and sincere *dervishes* would enter the house of the aristocrats and the elite, in order to administer Kalima to them and make them eat beef."

The persecution of the Hindus continued after the Sultanate ended and the Shia Chak rulers rose to the throne of the Hindu kingdom. The Mughals, who followed the Chaks, were expected to bring little respite to the Hindus. But they followed the persecution of the Hindus with greater zeal. The Mughal Governors appointed to rule Kashmir were rapacious, corrupt and religiously as bigotten as their predecessors were. The Afghan Pathans, who ended the Mughal rule over Kashmir, were the worst and virtually decimated whoever of the community of the Hindus had still survived, and whatever was left out of their religious heritage. The Hindus who were forced to flee their land suffered dispersion in India, the whole of which was now well under the heels of the Muslim rule.

The Hindus were recalled to life, when Kashmir was wrested from the Durrani Afghans by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. They retrieved whatever remained of their community and their heritage had survived. It will require serious effort to inquire and investigate into the impact of the five hundred years of Muslim rule on their religious culture. No such research study has been undertaken so far. Suffice it to say here that the Hindus of Kashmir, whoever of them survived the persecution of the Muslim rule, clutched fast to their Vedic traditions, their ritual structures, their modes of worship—the *Puja Paditi*, their schools of philosophy, the Hindu Dharma Sutras—and their ancient calendar, which they still follow scrupulously in the observance of their daily rituals, festivals and performance of their pilgrimages. The Muslim rule effaced the Hindus of Kashmir, reduced to ruins their cultural heritage, but they were not able to destroy the commitment of the Hindu community, whatever remained of it, to their religious culture.

Sanskrit Kashmir

The present study in the religious culture of the Hindus of Kashmir, undertaken by Chaman Lal Gadoo, is an attempt to provide the reader as well as the researcher, an objective and an in-depth study in the Hindu religious culture of Kashmir. Gadoo has undertaken the study in difficult circumstances, while the entire community of Hindus in Kashmir, is smoldering in exile, having been driven of its own land by a new form of Muslim aggrandizement—the Islamic Jihad for the libration of Kashmir from India and its inclusion in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. He has, however, succeeded in bringing to surface the essential features of the Hindu religious culture in Kashmir, and identify its Vedic foundations and its Sanskrit content.

Gadoo's study is, in a way first of its kind, in so far, as it is cast in a methodological context which is not bound within the trappings of the methodological paradigms followed by the British historians and their European contemporaries, nor is it restricted by the reductionist precepts of historiography adopted by the post- independence historians of India. He has placed his inquiry into the Hindu religious culture of Kashmir in the frames of reference, which are basically Indian and Sanskrit in content. Gadoo's explanations are not confined to the definitions of historiography, which is Semitic in approach. His explanations are derived from the historical and geographical expressions of India and the spiritual experience of the Indian people. He does not search for the "fertility deity" of the pagan era in the evolution of Semitic religions, as the colonial historians search leads him to the discovery of the Mother Goddess, Bhavani as the "Mother, who sustains creation."

Chaman Lal Gadoo has abandoned the whole structure of assumptions which the colonial historians of India based upon the race movements into India, including the Aryan invasion of India. Now that considerable scientific research and archeological investigations, have brought to surface vital and unassailable data about the ethnic compositions of the people of India, the theories of race movements into India, have turned out to be a myth. The report of the Anthropological Survey of India has established, beyond any doubt, the ethnic affinity of the people, who lived in Burzahom and the Harappan people. The convincingly large scale investigations in the ethnic composition of the people who live in India, particularly the north of India, have not shown any signs of ethnic movements across India or into India, virtually negating

the race movements into India and the evolution of the Hindu society on any ethnic overlap, and ethnic definition and conflict.

The abandonment of the old theory of the race movements and the Aryan invasion has led Gadoo to trace the Saraswat ancestry of the Hindus of Kashmir and the Vedic origin of their religious culture. He notes in the beginning of his study; "The history of Kashmir begins with the history of the Vedic civilisation of India. The people of Kashmir are a part of the Vedic people of India, who have inhabited Kashmir from the most ancient times, going back to the later stone-age culture of the Indian people in the north of India." He notes further; " The Hindus of Kashmir claim themselves to be Saraswat Brahmins and trace their ancestry to the Saraswat people who lived along the course of the legendry river Saraswati, which formed the cradle of the Vedic civilisation of India. The Vedic civilization evolved over the entire north of India and its evolution was spread over centuries and over an expanse of geography of the north India, which spread almost up to Vindhya mountains." Gadoo continues; "There is enough reason to believe that the people of Kashmir formed a part of the people, who lived along the course of the river Saraswati. It is hardly possible that the people who lived in Kashmir could not establish contact with the people who lived along the river Saraswati, Kashmir being so close to them. Archeological evidence has come to surface to suggest that Saraswati civilisation spread across around the west and south of the Kashmir valley."

The history of the religious culture of the Hindus of Kashmir runs into the hoary past of the Vedic age, the antiquity of which is still unfathomed. Evidently the Vedic age was continuity to which, the hymns of the Rig Veda gave the first expression. Infact, the Vedic hymns often make a mention of a more ancient people the "Pitro-Mankshya", the forefathers of the people who composed the Vedic hymns. There is no doubt that Kashmir formed a part of the Vedic tradition as Vitasta is referred in the Nadi Sukta of the Rig Veda in as venerable terms as the Saraswati, Ganga and Yamuna are. In Nadi Sukta, the rivers of India in the north are praised as follows:

> *Imam me Gange, Yamune, Saraswati, Suturdi, Satomam Sacta; Parusnaya, Asikya, Marudvrdhe, Vitastay, Arjikiye, Skmuhya, Susomaya!*
>
> O Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati, Sturdi (Sutlej), Parushni (Ravi), hear my praise!
>
> Hear me, Asikini (Chenab), Marduvridha ((Maru Vadhan), Vitastay (Vitasta), Arjkiya Sasomaya (Sohan).

Having, evolved with the Vedic civilisation of India, there is nothing pre-Vedic and post-Vedic in the religious culture of the Hindus in Kashmir. The Nagas and Pisachas, as well as, the Kashyapas, to whom the Nilmat Purana refers, were the people, who lived in Kashmir and the adjoining regions of the north of India. They were a part of the people who lived along the course of the river Saraswati and river Indus. The rituals referred to in the Nilmat Purana do not suggest any pre-Vedic cultural connects, though attempts have been made to prove otherwise. Infact, the Nilmat Purana and the Mahatmayas composed in Kashmir, establish beyond doubt, that the basic Vedic traditions underline the Hindu religious culture, which grew along the ages, right down to the time of the Nilmat Purana, the earliest of the sources of the history of Kashmir. Gadoo notes; "The sub-stratum of the Hindu religious beliefs is the tradition of the Vedas. The belief systems, as well as the ritual structure, of the Hindus of Kashmir, are Vedic, their ritual culture is Vedic—exactly that of the Athara Veda, and the Vedic Kalpa Sutras. All the Grah Sutras are a Vedic expression and the ritual culture of the Kashmiri Hindus is a Vedic expression. There is nothing in the Hindu religious culture of Kashmir, which the British historians and their European contemporaries have described as pre-Vedic or post-Vedic. Being a part of the Vedic civilization with its proto-Aryan roots, the religious culture of the Hindus of Kashmir, does not have any pre-Vedic history. Burzahom was on the fringes of the Vedic culture and doubtlessly, the belief-system of the Hindus of Kashmir grew as a part of the belief –system of the Saraswat Hindus."

The philosophical postulates which underline the belief-systems of the Hindus of Kashmir are Vedic in content. Shaivite monism, a major breakthrough in the realm of philosophy, could not be conceived except in terms of the Vedic foundations of the Advaita. The conceptualization of the Mother Goddess, Bhavani, as the primeval energy, which sustains all creation, and gives time its continuity, is primarily Vedic in basis. Bhavani is not the "fertility deity" of the pagan past of the Semitic religions. The Mother Goddess is the active element in the cause of creation. Vaishnavism, which regained supremacy during the Nilmat era of the Kashmir history, was a continuation of the Vedic tradition. The course of the Sanskrit religious culture of India, as it evolved across millennia, over the era of the Upanishads and the Brahmanas to the age of Puranas, is not marked by any disruption or discontinuity. In Kashmir too, the evolution of the religious culture has informally continuous without any break.

Chaman Lal Gadoo has scrupulously maintained the methodological uniformity in his study of the major aspects of the Hindu religious culture, the Hindu concept of the Mother Goddess, Bhavani, Vaishnava theological precepts and practice, and Shaivite monism. He has successfully attempted to distinguish between the Hindu concept of the divine in the form of the Mother and the concept of the "fertility deity" of the Semitic theology. The Hindus worship earth as "Mother Earth." It sustains creation. The river Saraswat is described in the Rig Veda as the, "*Ambitame*—the greatest of the mothers." The Mother Goddess represents the primeval energy of the divine will of the Parmatman. Rudra-Hridaya Upanishad and Devi Mahatmaya of the Markandey Purana describe the divinity of the Mother Goddess, and the various forms in which she manifest herself. Both the Rudra- Hridaya Upanishad and the Devi Mahatmaya articulate, "The vision of ultimate reality in the universe in the persona of the Goddess." Gadoo notes, "The Supreme power, the Brahman manifests itself in Shakti. Mahadevi Durga represents Shakti in Shaivism as well as in Vaishnavism. She is very powerful. Unless inspired by her neither, Brahma can create nor Vishnu can sustain, nor can Shiva destroy." Gadoo notes further, "In Kashmir, the worship of Mother Goddess assumes manifestations according to the expression of her nature. She is worshipped as Uma the part of Shiva. She is worshipped as the sustainer of the universe as Ragniya. She is worshipped as the consciousness of knowledge as Sharda and Saraswati. She is worshipped as the expression of the manifest energy as Jwala. She is worshipped in the form of the Kala—the absolute time, as Mahakali."

In the study of the philosophical systems of Shaivism and Vaishnavism, Chaman Lal Gadoo has followed an approach, which is not rigidly theological. He has traced the growth of the Shavite philosophical postulates within a context, pervaded by Vaishnavite and Buddhist theological precepts. Both were an expression of Sanskrit tradition of Hinduism with their Vedic foundations, Upnishadic and Brahamanic content and the Puranic context of a highly advanced social milieu, having achieved an unparalleled intellectual maturity. Gadoo has quoted Swami Lakshman joo, a Shavite scholar saint, to explain Shaivite conceptualization of monism. Shaivite philosophy in Kashmir has a closely knit structure of philosophical postulates. Gadoo has tried, in a simpler way, to identify the important philosophical postulates of Kashmir Shaivism.

Nilmat Purana is an eloquent testimony of the widespread acceptance of Vaishnavism among the Hindus of Kashmir and its religious significance. Infact, the Nilmat Purana is considered to be a Vaishnavite text. Though traced to Agmas, the Tantra Scriptural texts, which were composed in the later Vedic period and which constituted of "traditions"—which include procedures and practices of self-discipline, Yoga, esoteric rituals, exoteric worship, concentration, and other aspects of the spiritual experience of the Sanskrit people—all woven round the Vedic and Upnishadic conceptual constructs. Vaishnavism reached a level of rational integration with Shaivism, which also wielded considerable influence among the Hindus of Kashmir, when it found its formal expression in the conceptualization of Hari-Hara, the basic unity of Vishnu and Shiva. The concept of Hari-Hara, in its core is the acceptance of both Vishnu and Shiva as the two forms of the same fundamental cosmic reality.

The most important part of the study, Chaman Lal Gadoo has undertaken, is the elaborate description of the ritual culture of the Hindus of Kashmir. The description of the ritual culture of the Hindus, though mainly empirical, provides a wide field of indepth inquiry and research in the religious culture of Kashmir. Each of the rituals reflects the spiritual experience of the Hindus, representing an epoch in the Hindu history of Kashmir. Perhaps, indepth researches in the ritual structure of the Hindus can provide a clue to the antiquity of the Hindu religious culture of Kashmir. Indeed, several of rituals still performed by the Hindus of Kashmir, with unabated devotion, like the "Hearth" or Shivratri; "Novreh," new year day; "Novreh Amavsiya" etc. point to a more remote origin which goes back to the early Harappan—early Vedic period of the history of the Hindu religious culture. It is of interest to note that:

(a) the Hindus of Kashmir follow in their day to day life and in the observance of their rituals and the performance of their worship, the Nahshetra Calendar, which it is established now, was devised by Harappan people;

(b) the Hindus of Kashmir follow the same *Puja-Paditi*—the form of the procedure in the observance of their worship and rituals, that Vedic scriptures laid down;

(c) the Agni Devta has the same sanctity in rituals observed by the Hindus of Kashmir, as it has in the Vedic scriptures;

(d) the Hindus of Kashmir use in the performance of their rituals earthen-ware pots and vessels and plates of different forms and

different shapes, to represent different deities and phenomenon, which points to the remote antiquity of their *Puja-Paditi*;

(e) in the 'Hearth Puja,' known among the Hindus of Kashmir as the 'Wattack Puja,' the different earthen-ware pots and vessels are worn flower garlands of grass-strings in which dried yellow flowers are woven and which are called 'Wusur' in Kashmiri language;

(f) in all rituals, including funerary rituals, earthen-ware lamps are used without any exception and these earthen-ware lamps resemble in their shape, the earthen-ware lamps found in archeological excavations carried at the Harappan archeological sites and

(g) In every Hindu home in Kashmir, two small earthen-ware pots are kept on the niche just behind their hearts, which were called "Sani Wari" and which were filled with fresh water every day in the morning with few grains of rice. It is a Vedic ritual of which a mention is made in the Vedic Kalpa Sutra.

Chaman Lal Gadoo has based his study on a methodological model, which has received wide acceptance among the scholars of the Indian religious culture. He has made use of historical fact and data; he has been collecting and collated in recent years. In one respect, however, Gadoo has attempted to break new ground. His analysis of both facts and concepts has opened fresh ground for further and more indepth investigation and research in the religious culture of the Hindus in Kashmir. Gadoo stresses, the Sanatna Dharma enshrines a way in which the human form is lifted by its soul to merge with the absolute. The Hindus worship the divine as the divinity unfolds before them in its manifold forms. The Hindu religious culture "recognizes the essential unity between the universal and the existential. There is a continuity of its spirit which runs through millennia. The Hindus seek the communion of the *Atma* with *Parmatma*".

Million Hymn

The Hindus no longer live in Kashmir, land of their birth, where in lakes and rivers, from Gangabal to Prayag, the confluence of Vitasta and Sind, in Shadipur are strewn the ashes of their forefathers. They were driven out of their houses and homes in 1990, when Pakistan, the Jehadi war groups in that country operating in Kashmir, the Jehadi war groups in Kashmir and the Muslim separatist forces launched the

Jehad—religious war, to liberate Kashmir from India and unite it with Islamic Republic of Pakistan, ever since the Hindus of Kashmir are living in exile in Jammu and in other parts of India. The civilisational unity of the Hindus in India is symobalised by the collective consciousness of their spiritual heritage. Kashmir has for centuries been a part of the civilisational unity of the Hindus in India. The ruins of the ancient temples in stone are a mute testimony to the continuity of the history of the Hindus in Kashmir. Centuries of oppression and persecution have left their mark on the Hindu heritage of Kashmir.

For ages, on the banks of Vitasta, Ganga, Kaveri, Krishna and Yamuna, the Hindu temples resounded with the voice of a million hymns amidst the din of counches and bells. Among them was the temple of Somyar, situated on the banks of Vitasta at Habakadal in Srinagar. Somyar is no longer thronged by the Hindu devotees, who are smouldering in exile, hundreds of miles away. Somyar stands desolate in silence. The voice of a million hymns, which filled its portals, is also sunk in silence.

—MOHAN KRISHEN TENG

Chapter I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The history of Kashmir begins with the history of the Vedic Civilization of India. The people of Kashmir are a part of the Vedic people of India, who have inhabited Kashmir from the most ancient times, going back to the later stone-age culture of the Indian people in the north of India.

"The archeological exploration carried on by the Archeological Survey of India, conducted by their expert bodies in Kashmir, Punjab and Haryana have led to the discovery of new facts about the ethnic composition of the cultures that flourished in the north of India in ancient times and their historical continuity. The excavations carried on by the Archeological Survey of India, over a number of Neolithic sites in Kashmir have unraveled facts which establish the ethnic affinity of the Neolithic later the Harappan culture and people who lived along the banks of the legendry river Saraswati before the emergence of the Vedic-Age."

The Hindus of Kashmir claim themselves to be Saraswat Brahmins and trace their ancestry to the Saraswat people who lived along the course of the legendry river Saraswati, which formed the cradle of the Vedic civilization of India. The Vedic civilization evolved over the entire north of India and its evolution was spread over centuries and over an expanse of geography of the north India, which spread almost up to Vindhya Mountains.

Geological evidence has been found to suggest that the river Saraswati flowed down in a north-westerly course, in northern India from Himalayas to the Rann of Kutch, in ancient times. It is believed to have dried up sometime between the Vedic period and the time of Mahabharata. Geological evidence has been found to suggest that the withdrawal of the waters of the river Yamuna and Sutlej, which formed

the main tributaries of the river Saraswati, led to its disappearance. Yamuna changed its course to join the River System.

"Saraswati River was derived of its water by diversion of Yamuna to Ganges system, sometimes between Vedic age and the Mahabharata and Sutlej to Indus system, much later due to geotectonic movements, along the axis of Aravali range and was reduced to a dry river bed of several kilometers in width. Having lost its snow-fed sources the mighty river Saraswati disappeared and only legend remained in the folk-lore."

There is enough reason to believe that the people of Kashmir formed a part of the people, who lived along the course of the river Saraswati. It is hardly possible that the people who lived in Kashmir could not establish contact with the people who lived along the river Saraswati, Kashmir being so close to them. Archeological evidence has come to surface to suggest that Saraswati civilization spread across all around the west and south of the Kashmir valley. The belief systems, as well as the ritual structure, of the Hindus of Kashmir, have their source in the Vedic Kalpa Sutras and the Vedic Grah Sutras. The entire structure of the theological imperatives, the Hindus of Kashmir are bound in, have their origin in the Vedic religious precept of the Sanatana Dharma, the Sanskrit civilization of India, evolved.

Legend of Satisar

According to the legend, the valley of Kashmir, surrounded by mountain ranges on all sides, was a vast lake of water, which collected because there was no way for it to flow out. There are several versions of the legend, of how the lake was drained, and valley became fit for habitation. According to Vitasta Mahatmaya, the lake known as the Satisar was the abode of a demon Jalodbhava, who troubled the *Rishis* and other seers who lived along the banks of the lake Satisar. Kashyapa Rishi requested Balram, the brother of Lord Krishna to drain out the waters of the lake. The Mahatmaya records that Balram acceded to the request of Rishi Kashyapa and opened up a gorge in the mountain barrier at Khandan Yar, some distance ahead of Varahmulla, present Baramulla, with a stroke of the plough, he used as weapon of war. The waters of the lake flowed out of the gorge. Kashyap in the meantime requested Vishnu to destroy the demon Jalodbhava. Vishnu also acceded to his request and destroyed the demon Jalodbhava.

The Vitasta Mahatmaya records that Mahadevi Uma, the consort of

Shiva, Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu, Goddess Aditi, the mother of Devas, Sachi, the consort of Indra, the chief of Devas, Diti, Ganga and Karishni had come to Satisar with their spouses to see, how the waters of the lake Satisar were drained and how the demon Jalodbhava was annihilated.

The Koti-Tirtha Mahatmaya gives another version of the draining of the lake Satisar. The Mahatmaya records, that Vishnu, in his incarnation of the boar, breached the mountain barrier at Varaha Khetra, present Baramulla, with his *Sudershan Chakra.* The breach was made but a huge rock stuck in the breach, which did not allow the water to flow out. Vishnu found that the rock was actually the form; the Goddess Parvati had taken on the instructions of her father, the holy mountain Himavat or the Himalaya. Her father, the holy mountain, had instructed his daughter, to save her from the wrath of Shiva, after Kama Deva had distracted him in his trance, after the demise of his consort Uma. Parvati attended upon Shiva, after Uma's demise when he was in trance.

Vishnu approached the rock with supplication and addressed the Goddess in the rock: "O Goddess, having a pure smile. Give way to me so that I can drain out water. I will offer to you propitiation and ablution." With her approval Vishnu lifted the rock and put it on the bank where the Goddess took her abode along with her attendants on the bank of the river Vitasta. The water blocked by the rock flowed out through the breach made in the mountain barrier by Vishnu.

Another version of the draining of the Satisar Lake recorded in Nilmat Purana, narrates that the water of Satisar Lake was drained out by Ananta at the behest of Vishnu, through a breach in the mountain barrier at a little distance to the west of Baramulla. "The chief of the Nagas, the author of the Purana and son of Sage Kashyapa took care of the land and named after his father Kashyapa. The Nagas were not friendly with Pisachas, the group of people residing in the valley, but in course of time, they gained their goodwill." (Shali. p34)

A slightly modified version of the legend recorded by Nilmat Purana, which must have been extant in Kashmir, when Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim, visited Kashmir, is recorded in his travel account. Hiuen Tsang records that Kashmir was a Naga lake.

Fifty years after the Nirvana of Buddha, the disciple of Ananda Madhyantika came to Kashmir. Ananda was a disciple of Buddha. Madhyantika converted the dragon king of the lake to Buddhism. The king founded five hundred Buddhist Sangharamas and invited sages and

seers from outside the valley. The sages and the seers, Hiuen Tsang recorded, received religious offerings from the Nagas inhabitants of Kashmir.

Pandit Kalhana, who consulted earlier recorded sources, in preparation of his Rajatarangini, gives his own version of the legend, the Mahatmayas recorded. He wrote that Prajapati Kashyapa approached Shiva, Vishnu as well as Brahma, to drain out the waters of Satisar Lake and annihilate the demon Jalodbhava. After Vishnu destroyed Jalodhava, the waters of the lake were drained out, through an opening in the mountain-side at Baramulla. The land of Kashmir, after its emergence from the lake assumed the name of Rishi Kashyapa. Rajatarangini notes that the Nagas, who inhabited Kashmir possessed super-natural powers.

Another version of the draining out the waters of lake, which must have been in circulation in Kashmir, was recorded by a Persian chronicler, G.D.M.Sofi in his book, 'Kasheer', wrote that Kashmir was a deep lake formed by high mountains rimming the valley. The waters of the lake did not have a way to flow out. The chronicler notes that Sati, the Goddess Parvati, consort of Shiva, who wielded Shakti and the Mahadeva took a pleasure trip from her abode on the Harmukh peak in the Lar valley right up to Kaunsar Nag. The chronicler notes that Goddess Sati named the lake as Satisar, the lake of Sati. Then the chronicler proceeds to relate the struggle between Kashyapa and demon Jalodbhava, who had taken his abode in Satisar and the help he received from the Gods to destroy the demon. Then the chronicler recounts the story of the draining of the waters of the lake.

The Naubandhana Mahatmaya relates another version of the killing of the demon Jalodbhava and the draining of the lake. The Mahatmaya relates that three snow clad peaks in the west of Bannihal pass in the Pir Panjal, were traditionally considered to be the embodiments of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. All of them, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva commanded the demon Jalodbhava to come out from the lake Satisar, which he refused to do. Vishnu's brother Balbhadra struck the mountain-side near Baramulla with his plough, to open the way for the flow of the waters of the lake. Then Vishnu killed the demon Jalodbhava in a fierce fight. During the fight, Vishnu left the imprint of his feet on a rock at Kram Saras present Kaunsar Nag, situated below the Naubandhan Tirtha. The place where the rock with the imprint of Vishnu's feet is located in Kaunsar Nag is a place of worship for the Hindus of Kashmir.

The Sharikaparicchada Mahatmaya, which was composed to describe the spiritual significance of the Goddess Sharika, and her shrine

on the western spur of the Hari Parbhat hill situated in Srinagar, gives another version of how the demon Jalodbhava was killed and the waters of the lake drained out. The Mahatmaya relates how the demon Jalodbhava caused trouble to the sages and their disciples living along the banks of the lake. The Devas implored Goddess Sati, the consort of Shiva to deliver the sages and people living on the banks of the lake from the demon Jalodbhava. Goddess Sati assumed the form of Sharika—the *Maina* bird, '*sans*' in Sanaskrit and *Haar* in Kashmiri language. The *Maina (Haar)* picked a pebble in her beak and flew over the lake and dropped the pebble at the place where Jalodbhava, the demon lived. As the pebble dropped into the water, it grew into a huge hill, crushing the demon under its weight. The hill is now called Hari Parbat or Sharika Parbat. The shrine of Sharika is the manifestation of the Goddess Durga and represented by her symbol the '*Shri Chakra*'. It is also believed that, the Gods assumed their abode on the Sharika hill in gratitude to the Mother Goddess Sati.

Geological evidence corroborates the legend that the Kashmir Valley was a vast lake bound in mountain fastnesses. The water of the lake was drained out by geological changes which led to the opening of a gorge in the mountain barriers on the western side of the lake ahead of Baramulla. A well known geologist of India, D.N.Wadia writes in his work,' Geology of Kashmir'; "Pleistocene or post-Pleistocene deposits of the nature of fluviatile, lacustrine or glacial, spread over many parts of Kashmir, occupying a large superficial extent. The most interesting and conspicuous examples of these are the lacustrine deposits as low as flat mounds, bordering the slops of the mountains above the modern alluvium of the Jhelum. These are known as Karewas—*Vudar* in the Kashmiri language. The Karewa formation occupies nearly half of the Valley. They have width of eight to sixteen miles from Shopian to Baramulla. They have been held to be the surviving remnants of deposits of a lake which once filled the whole valley basin from end to end. The draining of that lake by the opening and subsequent deepening of the outlet at Baramulla, has laid them bare to denudation, which has dissected the once isolated alluvium into isolated mounds."

In pre-historic times, early habitation in Kashmir was confined to the Karewas. Traces of the habitations have been located at a number of places in Kashmir, including Burzahom. During the course of time, the geographical contiguity of Kashmir, the vast pulsating cultures of the early Sanskrit people of India living along the course of the great rivers Saraswati and Indus, led to the development of contact and

communication between the people of Kashmir and the Harappan people and the people of the Sind civilization. The people of north of India, including Kashmir, formed a part of same cultural continuum. The Nagas and the Pisachas as well as Kashyapas, also known as the Manavas to which the Nilmat Purana refers, must have been the descendents of the people who lived in Kashmir and the adjoining regions of the north of India, including the Harappan people and the people who lived along the course of the river Sind and the river Saraswati.

Rajatrangini

Rajatrangini, the history of Kashmir, composed by the Kashmir historian Kalhana, traces the history of Kashmir to the epic age of the history of India, the time, when Mahabharata war was fought. Kalhana records that about twenty years before the Mahabharata war was fought, the kingdom of Kashmir was ruled by the king named Gonanda I. The initial years of the reign of Gonanda I, according to Kalhana, was 653 of the Kali era. Then the kingdom of Kashmir must have been one of the several principalities in the north of India. Gonanda I was killed in war with Krishna of Mathura, which he had joined to assist his relative Jarasindh, the powerful king of Magadh and an adversary of Krishna.

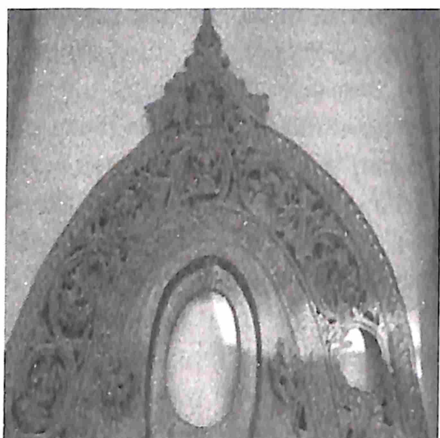
Gonanda I was succeeded by his son Damodhara I, who harbored the desire to avenge the death of his father. He fell out with Krishna on the occasion of the *Swayambara*, held in Gandhara, an ancient flourishing Hindu kingdom, sprawling along the banks of the river Indus and in the ensuing scuffle was killed by the latter. Krishna did not extend his domain to Kashmir and instead, installed Damodhara's queen, Yeshovati on the throne. Yashovati, expecting a child when Damodhara was killed, gave birth to a son, soon after her coronation. Yashovati crowned her son, the king of Kashmir, though he was an infant, under the title Gonanda II.

Kashmir kingdom did not join the Mahabharata war, as the occupant of its throne was a child. Neither the Pandavas, nor the Kauravas solicited the support of the kingdom of Kashmir in the war. After the Mahabharata war, Kashmir must have been either left out of the Pandava conquests or brought within it, because, after Mahabharata war, Pandavas lost no time to establish their sway over the whole of India. Kalhana's account of reign of Gonanda II and Yashovati is sketchy. About the historical events following the reign of Gonanda II,

Kalhana accepts that Gonanda II was followed by thirty-five kings, who "have been immersed in the ocean of oblivion, their names and deeds having perished through the destruction of records."

Kalhana mentions the names of eight more kings, who preceded the inclusion of the kingdom of Kashmir in Gonanda's domains. These kings were; Lava, Kula, Khagendra, Surendra, Godhara, Suvarna, Janaka, and Shachinara. However, except for their names, and the mention of some of towns and villages they founded, nothing is known about the history of their times. The period over which these forty-three kings ruled over Kashmir, was the most formative part of the history of Kashmir. This was the period, when the north of India faced the devastation, the drying up of the river Saraswati must have led to, and the vast movement of the Saraswat people to the east, north and south must have taken place. There are stray references in some early Hindu and Buddhist records, which suggest that Kashmir formed a part of Ghandhara, one of the sixteen Mahajanpadas of the north India. The British historians of India have also shown inclination to accept that Kashmir came under the Achaenium monarchy of Persia. There are stray references to suggest that Kashmir formed a part Abhisaras, principality of Poonch and Navshehra districts. Nothing is known if Alexander's invasion affected the Kashmir kingdom. The rise of the Mauryan power brought far reaching changes in the north of India. During the Bindusara's reign, his son Ashoka appears to have extended the sway of the Mauryan power over Kashmir. Kalhana mentions the details of Ashokan rule over Kashmir.

Ashoka laid down the foundations of a well organized polity in Kashmir with a well organized and efficient administrative structure. Ashoka founded the city of Srinagar, among the many villages and townships in the kingdom. Kalhana notes that Ashoka built numerous Viharas and Stupas in Kashmir as well as Shiva temples. He is believed to have introduced Buddhism in Kashmir, "At the conclusion of the deliberations of the Buddhist Council held at Patliputra, under the presidentship of Moggaliputta Tissa, Majjhantika was sent to Kashmir and Gandhara as the head of an evangelical mission. Heun Tsiang and On Kong mention the arrival of 5000 monks who were settled in Kashmir by Ashoka and his gift of the valley to the Sangha for turning it into a centre of study and propagation of Buddhist religious texts." (Bamzai p71)



Bronze frame with Vishnu incarnations



Three-headed Vishnu

Towards the close of Ashoka's reign, Kashmir was troubled by the Malechas. His son, Jalauka, who succeeded Ashoka, seems to have assumed independence after his accession to the throne of Kashmir. He cleared the Malecha menace and secured the borders of the kingdom of Kashmir. Jaloka was a great builder and founded many new villages and townships. The next king in succession was Damodara, an ardent supporter of Shaivism.

After the fall of Mauryan Empire, the Indo-Greeks, Malechas are believed to have established their sway over Kashmir. The history of Kashmir during the period after the fall of the Mauryas and the rise of the power of Kusans, who finally extended their power to the kingdom of Kashmir, is scantily known. Kanishka established the Kushan sway over Kashmir, which was continued by his successors, Vasishka and Havishka. Havishka was followed by Vasudev also called Jushka. Jushka died in 178AD. Jushka was succeeded by his son Abhimanyu I, with the accession of Abhimanyu, Buddhism suffered a set-back and the traditional Hindu religion made a phenomenal come back. Abhimanyu supported the revival of the old Hindu religion of Kashmir. Abhimanyu founded the township of Abhimanyu Pora, presently Bemuina, near the city of Srinagar. The successor of Abhimanyu, Gonanda III followed the religious policy of his predecessors. He ruled Kashmir for thirty-five years, establishing a new dynasty in his name. After the death of Gonanda III, he was followed by a succession of his successors:

Vibhishan I, Inderajit, Ravana and Vibishana II, about these reigns Rajatrangini provides little information. According to Rajatrangini, Vibishana II was followed by King Nara, who hailed from the

Vijayeshawari region. He died in a fire, which engulfed his palace. King Nara was of Naga decent. Nara was succeeded by his son Siddha, who was a pious king. He was succeeded by four kings, Utpalaksha, Hiranyaksha, Hiranyakula, and Vasukula, about whose reign; Rajatrangini does not provide much information.

The throne of Kashmir was usurped by Mihirakula, a fugitive, white Hun prince, who had taken refuge in Kashmir, after the Hun power in the north India was broken by the forces of the king of Malva, Yeshodharma, and the king of Magadha Baladitya. Professing Shaivist faith, Mihirakula lay in wait till he got an opportunity to seize the throne. Mihirakula was a cruel king, depraved and capricious and perpetrated atrocities on his subjects. His sadist mind led him to his destruction, when he committed suicide by jumping into a huge sacrificial fire, which he had lit himself.

After Mihirakula's death, he was followed by other Hun rulers. Most of them followed the Shaivite faith. Baka, who succeeded Mihirakula was a virtuous man and ruled Kashmir well. The next four kings who followed him are; Kshitinanda, Vasunanda, Nara II and Aksha. Their reign appears to have been uneventful. Aksha founded the town of Akshavala, present Acchabal. Aksha was followed by Gopaditya. Gopaditya built temple, atop the Gopa hillock in Srinagar. He is said to have stopped the slaughter of animals in his kingdom. His successor Gokarna passed an uneventful life and was succeeded by his son Khinkhila also called Narendra Ditya. He minted coins with his name as Deva Sahi Klingila and consecrated many shrines including the temple of Buteshwara. Khinkhila was succeeded by his son Yudhisthira I.

Yudhisthira I was a frivolous man, given to pleasure and indulgence. He ran away leaving his kingdom behind, when he came to know that his nobles had turned against him. He tried to regain his kingdom, but faced defeat, and was captured and put in prison, where he eventually died. After having disposed off Yudhisthira, the nobles of the kingdom invited a relative of king Vikarmaditya to Kashmir and crowned him the king under the name of Pratapaditya I. Pratapaditya was an able ruler and a benevolent man, who ruled his people well for a long period of thirty years. His son and successor, Jalauka also ruled Kashmir for thirty-two years. During the reign of his successor Tunjina, Kashmir was afflicted by a devastating famine. Floods followed by famines were common phenomena in Kashmir, where untimely rains and snow coupled with floods, brought misery to the people. Tunjina's queen Vakpushta was deeply religious and both the

king and the queen tried to ameliorate the condition of their famine stricken people. The queen built many temples and founded several townships in Kashmir. After the death of Tunjina the queen performed *Sati* and died on the pyre with her husband.

The throne now passed on to a scion of another family who became king under the name of Vijaya. Vijaya founded the famous town of Vijeshwara. He was followed by his son Jayendra, who died without an heir and the throne passed on to Sandhimati, a minister of the king Jayendra, under the name of Aryaraja. He was a benevolent ruler, who built many shrines, established several religious endowments. Sandhimati Aryaraja voluntarily abdicated and ended his days at the shrine of Shiva Bhutesha.

After Aryaraja, the reign of the Gonanda dynasty was restored and Meghavhana, a prince of the Gonanda dynasty, assumed the throne. Meghavhana was the son of Gopaditya, a great-grandson of Yudishthira. Meghavhana was more inclined towards the Buddhist faith. He prohibited animal sacrifice in his kingdom. He laid down the foundation of several townships and built Viharas. His queen Amritaprabha built a monastery named Amrita-prabhavana, present Vunta-bhavan, near the shrine of Vicharnag, in which Bhikshus from foreign countries were housed. The Vihara was known to the Chinese pilgrim On Kang.

Meghavahana was followed by his son Pravarasena, who was an able ruler and carried on the tradition of his father. During the reign of his successor Hiranya, rebellion plunged the Kashmir kingdom into turmoil. Courtiers with the support of the Brahmins invoked the intervention of Vikramaditya Harsha of Ujjain. Vikramaditya sent a Kashmiri-Brahmin Matrigupta, who was in his court, to assume the reins of power in Kashmir. The nobles and the Brahmins crowned Matrigupta, the king of Kashmir. Matrigupta was a just and liberal ruler, who ruled the kingdom ably. However, his rule was brief, because, he lost interest in ruling the kingdom after his patron Vikramaditya passed away and abdicated. He turned a recluse and took his abode in Banaras. Matrigupta's rule over Kashmir was exemplary. After him, the throne was reclaimed by Hiranya's son, who had taken refuge in Kangra, during the unsettled conditions in the kingdom. He assumed the throne under the name of Pravarsena.

Pravarsena was a just and benevolent ruler, besides being a deeply religious man. Unlike the long line of his predecessors, who did not opt for any major military activity, he undertook many military campaigns to put down rebellion in the border regions as well as extended his sway

south and west. He carried on a military campaign to subdue some tribal principalities in the north across the frontiers of his domains. But he did not annex the territories he conquered. So magnanimous was he that he gave back the territories to, "their own rulers and deprived none of his inheritance." (Bamzai p.115)



Payer Temple Carvings

He ruled for a long period of sixty years, and his reign can be termed as the first golden period of the Hindu kingdom of Kashmir. He laid the foundation of several towns in Kashmir, including the town of Pravarsenagar, the present city of Srinagar, which later became the capital of the kingdom of Kashmir. He was held in such reverence by his subjects that a legend grew round his death and it was said that, "he bodily ascended to heaven while worshipping in his temple, Pravaresa." (Bamzai p115)

Pravarsena was succeeded by his son Yudhisthira II, who ruled with the help of his able Ministers. Kashmir now, a prosperous kingdom, the king and his ministers built temples and Chaityas, among them the famous temple of Narendrasvamin. After Yudhistra, Kashmir was ruled by a long line of kings about whom Kalhana gives scant information. The last of the Gonanda line was Baladitya. Baladitya did not have a son. He married his daughter to a commoner—the steward of his stables, whose name was Durlabha Vardhana. After the demise of Baladitya, the throne of the kingdom of Kashmir was occupied by Durlabha Vardhana.

Karkota Kingdom

With the accession of Durlabha Vardhana to the throne of Kashmir, were laid down the foundations of the Karkota dynasty. Durlabha

Vardhana was a Karkota Naga by decent. He consolidated his power in a way his predecessors were not able to do. Infact, with the foundation of the Karkota dynasty, Kashmir witnessed several centuries, of peace and prosperity, which enabled Durlabha Vardhana and his successors to embark upon the conquest of the neighboring countries and regions in north, east and south of their kingdom. Durlabha Vardhana was an able ruler and ambitious as well. He under took a long military campaign to extend his kingdom over, the principalities of Poonch and Rajouri, situated to the south of his kingdom, across the Pir Panjal mountain ranges. He brought the turbulent tribal regions situated to the south-west of his kingdom under his sway and after that he is believed to have invested Taxila, which gave him the advantage to keep trade routes secure and safe. The regions, over which he established his sway, were populated by people who professed Hindu religion or Buddhism, or generally both and therefore, involved no major conflict. Hinduism and Buddhism were both Sanskrit in content and therefore, did not underline any political cleavages, which could have probably, put any strain on the kings of Kashmir in capturing the adjoining kingdoms and regions. Inside the kingdom of Kashmir as well, Hinduism and Buddhism flourished side by side—with their theological postulates almost identical, their forms of worship coincident and ritual structures nearby common. All religious variants of Sanskrit origin did not have any tight boundaries and therefore, did not come into conflict with each other. Huein Tsang visited Kashmir in the beginning of the Karkota rule.

Durlabha Vardhana was succeeded by son Pratapaditya II, who ruled Kashmir for half a century. Pratapaditya consolidated power of the Karkota Empire providing the Hindu kingdom enough stability to prosper in its economy, improving agriculture and promoting trade. This is evidenced by the widespread construction of towns, among them the town of Pratapapura, present Taper, and the temples, that he built there. Pratapaditya was succeeded by his son Candrapida, who ruled for a short time and was succeeded by his younger brother Tarapida. Tarapida's rule was short-lived and not only uneventful, but considerably rapacious. Tarapida was followed by his younger brother Lalitaditya Mukhtapida. Lalitaditya turned his attention to improve agriculture, drain swampy land to reclaim wetlands for cultivation and provide irrigational facilities to bring fallow under cultivation. This led to the vast increase in agricultural produce which accounts for the rise of a new class of land-owners—virtual feudal lords, who wielded the power of their wealth to share the power of the state. The feudal lords

were known as the Damars and their number and prosperity increased, they became power seekers. The prosperity of the kingdom led to increase in trade, which included trade with adjoining countries. He reformed the administrative organization of his kingdom, which evidently required special wings for trade and external relations, finances and treasury and special arrangements for the security of the palace and his capital.

Mukhtapida was an ambitious ruler and the overall prosperity of his kingdom made available to him the resources to embark upon extensive conquests and expansion of his domains. He extended his kingdom over the adjoining regions, the Punjab hills and a part of the Punjab plains. His conquest extended up to Kannauj. Then he turned his attention to the north, of his kingdom, where he brought the Dardic principalities and adjoining regions and parts of western Tibet under his control. Tibet was ruled by powerful Tsanpu kings those days, who kept the Chinese away from their domains. But most of the western Tibet was ruled by local potentates, who had hardly the strength to resist an organized force, Mukhtapida commanded. Mukhtapida sent an embassy to the Chinese court soliciting for an alliance ageist the Muslim advance in Central Asia.




Ancient Shiva Linga at Thawjiwara temple and Srinagar Museum

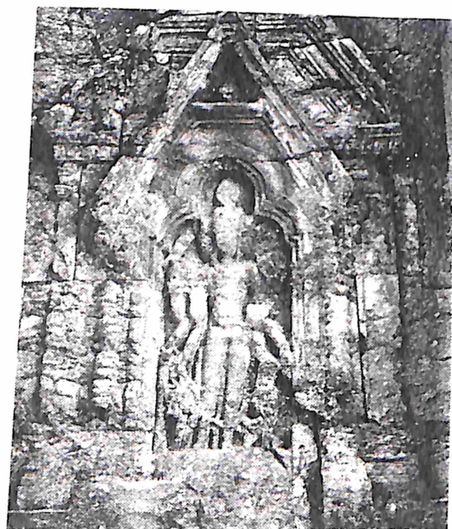
Having extended his kingdom and brought about prosperity to it, he embarked upon construction activity, building cities, like Parihasapura and temples as well as Buddhist Viharas and Agraharas. Among the temples he built was the Shiva Jyestha Rudra at Wangath, the famous temple of Martanda at Mattan, Anantnag, and the temple Parihasa Kesava at his capital Parihasapura along with four Vaishnava temples, dedicated to the worship of Vishnu. The king built Buddhist monaster-

ies, Stupas and Chaityas and placed huge statues of Buddha in most of them.

Mukhtapida was a benevolent king. He instructed his officials to keep the Damaras —feudal lords in check so that they did not fleece the peasant masses, allow the peasantry to keep enough of their produce to live upon, recruit army from all parts of the country and keep a strict watch on the frontiers to secure his kingdom. He encouraged trade, secured trade routes as well as opened up fresh avenues for trade with adjoining countries. Mukhtapida died while he was on a military campaign in the north, probably in Tibet.

After his death Lalitaditya was followed by his son Kavalpida. But Kavalpida reign was short-lived and Vajraditya ascended the throne. Vajraditya was no match to Lalitaditya and after a reign of seven years was succeeded by Prithvipida, who ruled for a shorter period of four years, and was followed by Sangramapida, who ruled Kashmir for seven years, which was largely uneventful. Sangramapida made way for his son, Jayapida, who ascended the throne in 751AD.

Jayapida was a powerful ruler, who set out on vast and wide military campaigns in the Punjab and the adjoining hill regions, reaching further south into Gangatic plans to defeat the king of Kanuaj. He had to return to Kashmir because his brother-in-law Jijja, who was also a minister in his court, seized the throne. Jayapida put down the rebellion and threw out Jijja. Jayapida ruled for thirty-one years, during which his kingdom saw considerable prosperity. He was an able ruler, though rapacious and harsh, which kept the Damaras in check and his subjects subdued. He founded the township of Jayapura-Andarkot, present Sumbal on the banks of river Jhelum. He passed away after a long reign of thirty-four years, leaving behind a rich and prosperous kingdom, which was ruled well. After Jayapida succession to the throne was smooth. Jayapida was succeeded by Lalitapida, who ruled for twelve years. He was followed by Prithvipida, who ruled for seven years. Both ruled their kingdom



Martand Temple Sculpture

effectively and consolidated their power to maintain the pace and prosperity of their kingdom. After the death of Prithivipida, the throne was claimed by Lalitapida's son born of a concubine, whose name was Cippata-Jayapida. He ruled the country well, and ruled for twelve years. But after his death the succession was not smooth.



Shiva, Pandenthran



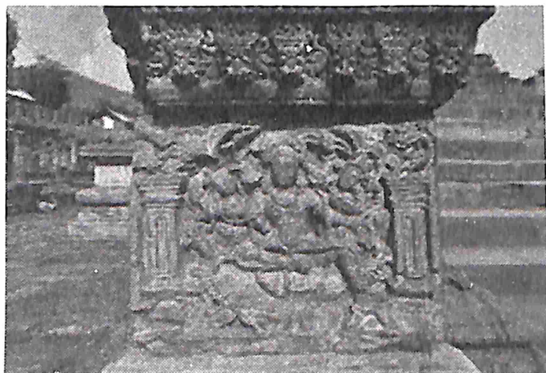
Avantipora Temple

Cippata Jayapida was followed by his brother's son Ajitapida, who was deposed and the throne was occupied by Anangapida, son of Sangramapida. After his death, the throne passed on to Utpalapida, the son of Ajitapida, who had been deposed to make way for Anangapida. After the reign of Jayapida, the Karkota dynasty began to weaken. The most difficult problem the Karkotas faced was the rise of a widespread feudal aristocracy, which the vast advance in agriculture and overall prosperity of the kingdom brought about. The landed hierarchies called the Damars, were not feudal lords, in the technical sense of the term and did not wield the power that the landed aristocracy in feudalism did. But they were land owners, who because of their resources came to wield power, particularly during the reign of the weak kings, often to the disadvantage of the ruler and his authority. The problem became more intricate when clan-groups, like the Lavanyas and Ekangas, assumed appropriated land and acquired wealth and power and became Damars. Contest for power, share the authority of the state or compete within themselves, had an adverse effect on the power of the kings and weakened their hold on their subjects. The weakening of the central authority led to the rebellion in the various regions of the kingdom, which the early Karkotas had annexed to their empire. The regions

situated south of the Pir Panjal Mountains broke away and small principalities like Rajouri, Poonch etc. assumed independence. The struggle for succession, which continued for half a century after Ajitapida's death, weakened the authority of the Karkota kings further. In 857A.D. the grandson of the brother concubine of Lalitapida, Avantivarman seized the throne, brining the reign of the Karkota dynasty to its end, and laying the foundations of the Utpala dynasty.

Utpala Dynasty

Avantivarman was an able ruler. He restored stability and order in the strife-torn kingdom and put down rebellion and internal revolt. However, he was wise enough not to embark upon any military activity to regain the adjoining regions and neighboring principalities which had broken off from the Kashmir kingdom, as he realized that did not have the resources to do so and he avoided to tax the people of his kingdom who were already impoverished by misrule, oppression, famines and floods. He turned his first attention to improve the plight of the people, took measures to prevent floods which caused severe famines in his domain and secured trade routes to improve trade and other activities in his domain on. He got the river Jhelum dredged and deepened the spill out course of the river, which did not only lessen the chances of floods, but drained out vast lands under water and enabled the reclamation vast swampy low-lands, to be brought under cultivation. This enabled him to extend the habitation to new lands and founding of new towns and villages. He carried out extensive drainage and constructed a network of irrigation canals, which enabled his subjects to bring more land under cultivation. Kashmir had become an important centre of trade and perhaps, had advanced in the manufacture of woolen cloth, wooden crafts and tools, wicker-work and stone-carving, for which Kashmir had earned a name in the adjoining regions.



Avantiswami Temple Sculpture

The king himself initiated widespread construction work, including towns and temples. He founded the town of Avantipur, where he established his capital and built two massive stone temples, one dedicated to the worship of Shiva and other to Vishnu. Avantivarman was a strict follower of Vaishnavism, but promoted Shaivist as well as Buddhist religions as well. The other famous towns he built was Avanti Bhawan to east of the famous township of Vicharnag—one of the places, where some people believe, the fourth Buddhist Council was held and the town of Soyapur present Sopore, which he named after his able engineer Soya, who dredged the river Vitasta.

During his reign, the construction of Hindu temples, assumed considerable encouragement and the king as well as his courtiers and people, had the resources to undertake widespread construction work. In fact, his reign is considered to be the second golden period of Hindu architecture, the first being the reign of the Karkota king Lalitaditya Mukhtapida. The temple construction began during the Karkota period, assumed more refined form during the reign of Avantivarman.

Intellectual activity, including the theological discourses on Shaivism, Vaishnavism and Buddhism, reached a very high level of achievement during the reign of Avantivarman. The patronage, the whole institutional framework of Hindu and Buddhist learning and contemplation received from the king and his court, adding an ever abiding contribution to Sanskrit literature. Of the great thinkers, who lived during his rule, was Ratanahara, Anandvardhan, Kallata and Shiva Swamin, Kayatacharya, Soomananda and Mukhtakantha Swamin.



Coronation Ceremony of King Avantivarman

After Avantivarman's demise, his son Shankaravarman succeeded him to the throne of Kashmir. Shankaravatman was fired with the ambitions of foreign conquest. He embarked upon extensive military campaigns which because of the changed surroundings were largely unsuccessful and more costly. The heavy burden of the campaigns drove him to impose heavier demands on his people, who were impoverished and therefore, restive. He dealt with the feudal aristocracy of the Damara landlords, who had become more powerful because of the prosperity his predecessor had got to his kingdom with little equanimity, which caused widespread disaffection among them. Shankarvarman did not spare the temples and shrines as well, from where he made good with gold and other treasures. He took away the idols of gold and silver, which had been installed in many temples, to fill his coffers. As many as sixty four temples were plundered by him. Himself he built the town of Shankarpura present Pattan, in which he and his queen, Sugandha built two magnificent temples in which he used some of the materials plundered from Pariharspura. The temples stand in ruins now.

Shankarvarman's successors were weak and were unable to remain in power for long. The hierarchies of feudal lords interfered with their administration and often with their power. The Damars, the Ekangas, the Tantrins, acted to weaken the authority of the king in their own way. Gopalaverman, who succeeded Shankarvarman and the queen Suganda, followed each other in rapid succession. Suganda was killed in the conflict. A number of ineffective kings succeeded to the throne, but they were at the mercy of the feudal hierarchies, which wielded real power. Finally, in 939AD after more than three decades of struggle for succession and interim strife, an assemblage of Brahmins installed a Brahman Yashaskara, on the throne, bringing the reign of the Utpala dynasty to its end.

Yashaskara restored peace and order in the strife torn kingdom, put down rebellion weeded out unruly and corrupt officials, and protected trade and roads. He however, did not last long, as he contracted a fatal disease. He abdicated in favour of his cousin, but replaced him, by his minor son Samgramadeva and himself repaired to a Matha, where he passed away. After his death one of his ministers Pravagupta usurped the throne. Pravagupta died a year after he had seized the throne. He was succeeded by his son Kshemguta in 950AD.

Kshemgupta turned out to be an imbecile and a drunkard. However, his queen, Didda, the daughter of Simharaja, the chief of

Lohara, took the reins of power in her own hands. Ruthless and effective, she ruled the kingdom effectively. Kshemgupta died in 958AD. He was followed by his minor son Abhimanu, and Didda took over as his regent. Didda's regency was full of troubles during its early years. But Didda put down rebellion and intrigue with a stern hand. Abhimanu died in 972AD, and was succeeded by his son Nandigupta. Smitten with grief Didda built the shrine of Didda Matha, on the banks of Jhelum in Srinagar and many other temples. She did not carry on well with Nandigupta and removed him from her way and placed his younger brother Tribhuvana on the throne. She did not carry on well with Tribhuvana as well and got him killed and installed his younger brother, her third grandson, on the throne. Four years after he had ascended the throne, Didda disposed him off, because he disapproved of her reproachable ways in private and public life. Then she assumed the reins of power in her own hands in 831AD. During her long reign of twenty-five years, she faced rebellion, intrigues and the unrest fomented by the feudal hierarchies and tribal leaders as well as protests by her nobles and Brahmins, dealing with each problem, without any consideration of the means she chose to use. She suppressed an uprising in Rajouri and successfully dealt with smaller eruptions in the regions surrounding her domains and under her protection with a heavy hand.

Finally, she chose Sangramraja, the son of her brother, Udhyana, the chief of Lohara to succeed her. Thus, when the aged queen died in 1003AD, after half a century of ruthless government, first as the queen consort, then as regent and ultimately as sovereign, the crown passed quietly and without any contest or convulsion to the new dynasty, the house of Lohara.

Decline and Fall

By the time Lohara dynasty established its sway over Kashmir, the northern India was in a great flux due to the invasion of the Indus region and the planes of the Punjab by Mahmud Ghaznavi. Ghaznavi led several expeditions to invest Kashmir, but failed to enter the kingdom. After the fall of the Sahi kingdom due to its defeat by Ghaznavi, Kashmir was exposed to Ghaznavi's attack. Ghaznavi invaded Kashmir, when he was on his sixth expedition to India. His forces were however, kept at bay around Tosamaidan pass in the Pir Panjal mountain range, till the winter set in, forcing him to withdraw.

Sangramraja, the founder of the Lohara dynasty died in 828AD.after a long reign of twenty-five years. He was succeeded by his son Hariraja. Hariraja died shortly after his accession. His younger brother Ananta was crowned the king. (Bamzai p.153)

Ananta re-established his sway over Chamba and several other hill states. He abdicated in favor of his son Kalasa on the advice of his queen in 1063AD. Kalasa, however, did not come up to the expectations of his father and Ananta retained the real power in his own hands. The arrangement did not work well and in the ensuing altercation with his son, he finally ended his own life. Kalasa, after his father's death proved to be an effective ruler, restored peace and order, punished the corrupt Kayasth officials, improved his finances and his administration. The efforts of the king ushered in an era of peace and prosperity.

Lohara Dynasty

With enough resources at his disposal; Kalasa re-established his authority over the neighboring regions and hill states from Urusa, now called Hazara, in the west to Kastava now called Kishtwar in the east, besides Chamba, Kangra and Asta. Kalasa did not go on well with his son Harsha. He repaired the temple of Martand, in his last days after having decided to crown his younger son Utkarsa in place of Harsha. He put Harsha in prison, where he remained till Kalasa died and Utkarsa was crowned the king. Utkarsa's reign did not last long. Harsha escaped from the prison and seized the throne, after he over threw Utkarsa.

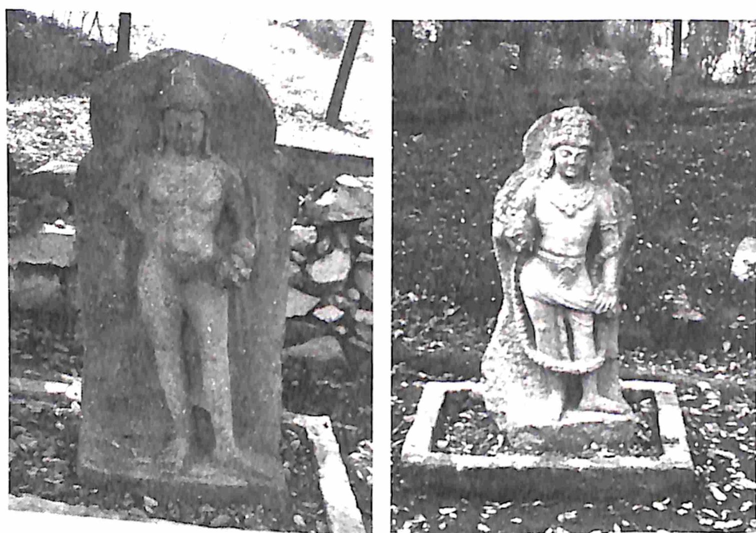
Harsha assumed the throne in 1089 AD. He ruled well, restored peace in his kingdom, put down rebellion and unrest, secured trade routes and improved irrigation and other agricultural facilities. This led to the reduction of the economic distress the people faced due to the unsettled conditions during the rule of his predecessors. However, he embarked upon costly military expeditions and his own extravagance besides, a continuous military preparedness, which he had to maintain to secure his rule from internal feuds, strained his resources. His recourse to the imposition of fresh taxes on the people caused widespread disaffection among them. But, instead of steering himself out of his difficulties, he seized the gold and silver of the temples and *Maths* and confiscated the golden and silver images installed there.

His miseries increased manifold because, plague broke out in his kingdom, which was followed by flood and famine, taking a heavy toll

of life and resources. After hardly a decade of his rule, rebellion broke out again with the Damars joining the rebels. The rebellion was headed by two brothers, both decedents of a side branch of the Lohara dynasty Uccala and Sussala. Harsha was unable to quell the unrest, which spread all over the kingdom. The administrative structure of the kingdom having broken down, he was abandoned by his courtiers and his armies and was left alone a fugitive in his capital, hiding from his enemies. He was found out and killed. Uccala finally seized the throne founding the second Lohara dynasty.

With the accession of Uccala to throne, the simmering internecine strife in the kingdom did not end. The Damaras were bent upon to keep the conflict alive. The rapacious Kayastha, who run the administration, deepened the discontent among the people. Soon Uccala's brother Sussala, who was not content with the treatment, he received from his brother, joined the fracas. Uccala was murdered in a conspiracy hatched by a claimant to the throne, Chudda, who traced his ancestry to the king Yashaskara. His attempt to usurp the throne failed and day after he had seized the throne, he was killed. The Damaras then installed Salhana, the half brother of Uccala on the throne. Salhana was removed within a short time, and Sussala crowned the king. Meanwhile, the Damaras feuds continued. Sussala was also removed and in his place, a pretender Bhiksachara was installed the king. A year later, he too was removed and Sussala restored. Sussala, abdicated in favour of his son Jayasimha, though he retained the reins of power in his own hands. He was however, killed in 1128 AD in a feud, and his son Jayasimha assumed the throne.

When Jayasimha assumed the throne, he found his kingdom in turmoil, with Damaras having over-whelmed it in its length and breadth. As Kalhana recorded, "the city was without splendor, the citizens deprived of all means and the land over-run by numberless Damaras, who were like kings." Jayasimha took time to consolidate his power. He ruled for twenty-seven years. For most of his time he had to fight his adversaries and keep the Damaras at bay. Jayasimha died in 1155 and was followed by his son Parmanudeva. During the rule of Parmanudeva, Kashmir regained a measure of peace and prosperity. He died in 1165AD and was succeeded by his son Vantideva. Vantideva ruled for seven years and died without an heir, bringing the reign of the Lohara dynasty to its close.



Panderthan Temple Sculptures

With the end of the Lohara dynasty the kingdom of Kashmir entered a long period of decline. The nobles assembled to chose a successor to the throne and their choice fell upon an imbecile. His successors were in no way better. Rebellion and civil war tore the country apart. The feudal barons appropriated most of the land in the kingdom and fought with each other to extend their possessions. The administrative officials, the Kayasttas plundered the treasury. A long line of kings ruled the kingdom for more than a century. The line of kings beginning with Upadeva, chosen by Brahmin assembly, was followed by Jassaca, Jagadeva, Rajdeva, Sangramdeva and Ramadeva. Ramadeva did not have a son and adopted a boy, Lakhshmandeva, who succeeded him after his in 1273AD. Lakhshmandeva was killed in 1286 AD., after which anarchy prevailed in the kingdom, with the two Damara lords Sangramchandra of Lar and Simhadeva of Dakhinpur districts fought each other for ascendance. Finally, Simhadeva triumphed and assumed the throne in 1286 AD.

Simhadeva embarked on a campaign of pacification and consolidation. He succeeded only partially. The country had almost broken-up, its unity impaired and economic organization damaged severely. Simhadeva, only a feudal baron, was unable to undo the damage. He lost his life in an intrigue which he had himself hatched. His brother Sahadeva succeeded him in 1301 AD. More enterprising than his brother, he was able to restore peace and order in the kingdom. He led

several military campaigns to bring back the recalcitrant chieftains, in the south and west of Kashmir, under his sway, because, many chieftains of the forts on the frontier of the kingdom, known as the Kota Raja, flouted his authority.

By now great changes had come about in the north of Kashmir, where the Mongols had upturned the whole of Central Asia. Sahadeva did not have the political acumen to realize the dangers growing in the north. His Prime Minister and the Commander-in-Chief of the army, Ramachandra was an able man, but he too was hardly equipped to rise up to meet the changed conditions, around the borders of his master's kingdom. In 1320 AD a Tartar chieftain of Central Asia, Zulqadar Khan, a marauder and plunderer, swooped upon the kingdom of Kashmir. Sahadev tried to buy peace with the invader by offering him huge sums of money and treasures. Zulqadar Khan squeezed whatever he could from the king, fell upon his people, killed thousands of them and looted them. Sahadev abandoned his kingdom and fled to Kishtwar. Zulqadar Khan collected a huge booty and along with thousands of men and young women, left Kashmir. On his way, while he was crossing the Pir Panjal, a snow storm overtook him and he perished along with his retainers and the men and women, he carried with him. Taking advantage of the chaos, the kingdom had been plunged into by Zulqadar's invasion; the Gaddis of Kistwar raided the kingdom. Ramachandra, who had assumed the reins of power and proclaimed himself the king, beat back the Gaddis, to save whatever he could in his domains. Ramachandra had with him Rinchen, a Tibetan fugitive chieftain, who had taken refuge in Lar, and a Muslim adventurer Shah Mir, a soldier of fortune who had taken service in the kingdom of Kashmir during the reign of Sahadeva. Not long after Ramachandra assumed the throne, Rinchen and Shah Mir joined to hatch a conspiracy against their benefactor and killed him in his sleep. Rinchen seized the throne with the help of Shah Mir. Then he married Ramachandra's daughter Kota. Shortly after some time, he embraced Islam, evidently on the advice of Shah Mir, who supported him with his retainers. He assumed the title of Sadar-U-Din.

Rinchen consolidated his hold on the Hindu kingdom, with the help of Shah Mir, who worked adroitly to divide the Hindu population to enhance his power. Rinchen faced a rebellion among his subjects, which was led by Udyandeva, Sahadeva's brother, who laid the claim to the throne. Rinchen quelled the rebellion, but in the fracas he was injured. He died of his injuries after sometime. After his death,

Udyandeva returned with a well-equipped force to claim the throne. He ascended the throne, in 1323 AD, and married Kota Rani. His reign ended in 1338 AD, when he died.

Kota Rani took the reins of power into her own hands as she harbored genuine fears about the intentions of Shah Mir, who had grown in power and had collected a mercenary force to support him in case of need. She appointed a capable minister, Bhata Bhikshana as her chief adviser. Shah Mir got Bhikshana murdered. Kota Rani tripped at the crucial movement and failed to act against Shah Mi and remove him from her way. Shah Mir did not wait while Kota Rani was away in dealing with insurrection at Inderkot; Shah Mir seized the capital and proclaimed himself the king. Kota Rani fought back for some time, but was finally overpowered. Shah Mir offered to marry Kota Rani, but she ended her life. Shah Mir crowned himself the Sultan of Kashmir under the title Shamas-U-Din in 1339 AD. His accession to throne of the Hindu kingdom marked the beginning of the Muslim rule over Kashmir.

Muslim Rule

The establishment of the Muslim rule over Hindu kingdom of Kashmir changed the whole context in which the Hindu religious culture of Kashmir had grown and flourished. Perhaps, the Hindus did not realize the implications of the change, the rise of Shah Mir had brought about. Shah Mir, however, was a shrewd politician, a man of great foresight. He did not lose the sight of the goal, he had set himself to achieve. He was aware of the endocrine decay to which the Hindu social organization was exposed, because of geography of the Kashmir kingdom. He had the first-hand knowledge of the power-structure of the Hindu kings, and the vast influence, the feudal hierarchies, organized more on their clan loyalties, like the Samaras, the Lavanyes, the Kanga, the Tantrums, wielded in the affairs of the state. He was also aware of the power which the Raja-Stanzas-the Kayasthas, who constituted the administrative organization of the Kingdom, wielded. He faced a population, which was alien and professed a faith to which he did not belong. He however, had deftly avoided arousing any misgiving about the faith he professed. While he played the royal claimants to the throne against each other, he removed all obstacles in his way. "He established alliance with boron's through the marriage of his children and grand-children into their families. With the help of these powerful relations he took possession of large estates which he controlled without any

interference from the king or his queen."It was indeed, one of his matrimonial allies—Lutsa, the lord of the Marshes, who came to his rescue, when he was desperately fighting the forces of Kota Rani, after he had risen in revolt against her. He had attempted to win the support of the population of the city of Srinagar, largely poor, by opening the treasury of the kingdom, after he had beaten back the army of Kota Rani. The Hindus waited for him to deliver them from the protracted turmoil that had prevailed in their land, since Zulqadar's invasion. Shah Mir delivered them to the subjection of a Muslim state. Shah Mir was a foreigner and a Muslim. He was not bound by the religious imperatives, his Hindu subjects followed, and a situation, which he used to consolidate his hold on the Hindu kingdom. The Muslim conquerors had used religion as an instrument to establish their hold over entire complex of Hindu and Buddhist Janpads and principalities in the north-west of India. Shah Mir, followed the other Muslim conquerors and as successfully as they had.

Once in possession of power, he moved swiftly to curb the power of the feudal hierarchies, which had been a powerful factor in the destabilization of the Hindu kingdom, driving many of them to accept Islam. He built new flanks of landed interests from among the society constituted of emigrant tribes like the Chaks and the Magrays from whom he drew "his generals and soldiers." (Sufi, p.133). He curbed the power and influence of the Kayasthas—the officials who run the administration. Shah Mir died in 1342 AD.

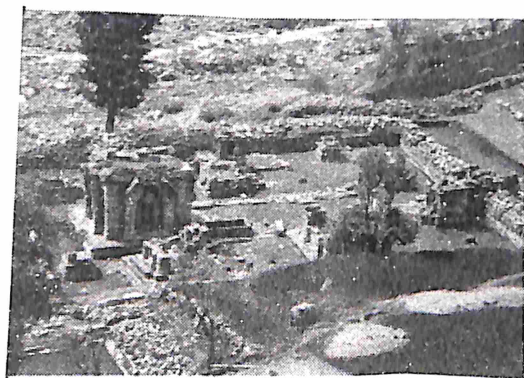
The Muslim rulers who succeeded Shah Mir consolidated the Shah Miri Sultanate further. First they changed the whole structure of power the Hindus had built to rule the kingdom. The Muslims established a centralized power-structure, with an organized Muslim clerical order to supplement its authority over a population which was predominantly non-Muslim. The power-structures, the Muslims forged all over India, were mainly para-military political organization which derived their sanction and support from the Muslim clerical order, which they installed everywhere in their domains. The Sultans did not deviate from this practice, after they installed a clerical order in Kashmir, which they entrusted with temporal authority to enforce the precept and precedent of their religion. The Hindus were thus, suddenly, reduced to the state of a subject population, ruled by alien rulers in accordance with precept and precedent of an alien faith.

Muslim religious preachers and missionaries began to arrive in Kashmir, shortly after the establishment of the Sultanate. Obviously

they set out to propagate their faith in right earnest and interference and appropriation of the Hindu temples and shrines commenced during the reign of the immediate successors of Shah Mir. During the reign of Qutub-u-Din, third Sultan in succession to Shah Mir, the Hindus had been relegated to such a state of helplessness, that they were unable to prevent Syed Ali Hamadani, a Muslim missionary, to establish his quarters in the temple of Mahakali, in the heart of the city, which was one of the most sacred of the Hindu shrines, and construct a Khanqah over it. The Kanqah is now known as Khanaqah-e-Maula.

In 1389 AD fifty years after founding of the Sultanate, Sultan Sikandar, the fourth Muslim-king in secession to Shah Mir, ascended the throne of Kashmir. With his accession commenced the long process of the enforcement of the Islamic Shariath in Kashmir and consequent persecution of the Hindus which battered them beyond repair. The prohibition of idolatry, the core of the Hindu faith, the destruction of their temples and religious institutions, the suppression of their faith and the proseletisation of the heathen, which Sikandar embarked upon, brought death and destruction to the Hindus.

Jonraja, who left behind an account of the turbulence which followed the founding of the Shahmiri Sultanate and the establishment of the Muslim rule in Kashmir, lamented that the Muslims descended upon the ancient Hindu kingdom as the hosts of locusts descend upon corn fields. Corroborating Jonraja, Sir Walter Lawrence, a British official posted in Kashmir, who wrote extensively on Kashmir, noted in his book, 'The Valley of Kashmir'; "After destroying most of their temples, Sikander turned his attention to the people who worshipped there and he offered them three choices: death, conversion and exile. Tradition affirms that only eleven families of Hindus were left alive in Kashmir."



Naranag Temple Ruins

After about two hundred years of its rule, the Sultanate came to an end, with the rise of Chaks to power in Kashmir. Chaks were Muslims of the Shia sect. The Chak rulers were as committed to the propagation of their faith, as the

Sultans were to the Sunni faith and followed a relentless policy of suppression of the Sunnies as well as the Hindus. Chak rule last for less than forty years from 1555 AD to 1587 AD and was replaced by the rule of Mughals, who annexed Kashmir to the Mughal Empire in 1586 AD.



Ruines of Temple at Wular Lake

For the Hindus, the Mughal rule was hardly different from the rule of the Sultans and Chaks. The Subedars appointed by the Mughal kings to govern Kashmir were as rapacious and oppressive as their predecessors were. They were as deeply religious and actively supported the propagation of their faith. During the reign of the Mughal king Aurangzeb, the Hindus of Kashmir invoked the intervention of Sikh Guru, Guru Teg Bahadur, to save them and their faith. During the reign of Aurangzeb's successors, the Hindus were subjected to persecution as severely as they had faced under the Sultans and Chaks.

The Mughals ruled Kashmir from 1586 AD to 1752 AD, when they lost the land to Durrani Pathans. Pathan rule brought the worst of the time for the Hindus, who were now considerably reduced in number and virtually living as fugitives surviving by their instinct. They were driven to such a state of desperation, that they sent a secret delegation to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, to deliver them from their subjection to the Pathan rule and save whatever was left of them in Kashmir.

The Muslim ruled the Hindu kingdom of Kashmir in accordance with the tenets of the Shariah, the way; the Muslims ruled the rest of India, which they had brought under their tutelage long before they established their hold on Kashmir. "There was no difference in the religious policy of the Muslim rulers in India and the religious policy of the Muslim rulers in Kashmir, who established their hold over the ancient Hindu kingdom in the early fourteenth century AD. The Muslim rulers of Kashmir disapproved of all forms of idol worship, the same way the Muslim rulers in India did. The Hindu temples and shrines, being the centers of idol worship among the Hindus, evidently attracted the wrath of the Muslim rulers, who proclaimed themselves, the defenders of their faith. In many respects the severity of persecution

of the Hindus in Kashmir, was greater than in the rest of India and the temples and Hindu shrines were exposed to wider destruction, than they were in the rest of the country."

The persecution of the Hindus steadily increased with the successors of Shah Mir, who followed the policy of the Muslimisation of their Hindu subject population more vigorously, to widen their support bases. The Muslim rulers initiated a three pronged policy to further the prosecution of the Hindus and efface the Hindu religious culture.

"First, they launched a widespread campaign of forcible conversions of Hindus to Islam. Secondly, they mounted an assault to demolish the Hindu temples and places of worship. Thirdly, they destroyed the Hindu institutions of learning, burnt down their libraries and dumped piles of books and manuscripts in the Dal Lake." The attack was widespread and well organized. "Besides the institutions of learning there were a large number of institutions, where teaching was imparted in Tantric Hinduism of the Agma School. These institutions were run by Shaiva Acharyas, most of whom taught the tenants of the Agma Shaivism and Kundalani Yoga. Many of the institutions had rich libraries of books, manuscripts and the commentaries of the Shaiva Acharyas and the commentaries of great masters of Shaivism like Adi Shankaracharya and Abinavgupta." (Kashmir—Hindu Shrines, by C.L.Gadoo. p 156-157).

Sikh Rule

Maharaja Ranjit Singh wrested Kashmir from Durrani Pathans in 1819 AD. The conquest of Kashmir by the Sikhs retrieved the Hindus from their subjection to the Muslim rule and ended the religious persecution they had borne for about five hundred years of the Muslim rule. However, by the time, they were liberated by the Sikhs, they were battered beyond repair. All that remained of them was a few thousand of families comprising less than twenty-five thousand souls. Freed from Muslim subjection, broken-up and steeped in poverty and distress, the Hindus did not have the strength and the resources to reclaim their religious heritage. Their temples and shrines were scattered around in ruins. Nothing remained of their religious institutions and the libraries attached to them. All that they still possessed was a commitment to observe their rituals and religious practices, the way they had done, before the advent of the Muslim rule. They did not reclaim the temples and shrines, which lay in ruins. Their courage broken up by centuries



Dancing Shiva carved in wood during ancient Kashmir

of oppression, they jealously guarded their religious identity and exhibited a keen commitment to perform their rituals and their religious practices according to their *Puja- Padvati,* devotedly.

The Sikh state began to decline after the demise of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1837AD. Kashmir was not left un-effected. After the defeat of the Sikhs in the first Anglo-Sikh War in 1846 AD, Kashmir, Jammu and the frontier of Ladakh which formed a part of the Sikh state, were re-constituted into a separate State of Jammu and Kashmir under the rule of Raja Ghulab Singh of Jammu. Shortly before the transfer of Kashmir to Ghulab Singh, the last Governor of Kashmir, appointed by the Sikh Durbar, Sheikh Imam-U-Din, secretly invoked the British support to turn Kashmir into a Muslim state. A section of the Muslim landed aristocracy and the Muslim clergy supported him. The Hindus kept themselves in touch with the garrison of Ghulab Singh's troops, which was closeted in the Hari Parbat Fort. The British turned down the overtures made by Sheikh Imam-U-Din, and Kashmir was finally integrated in the new State of Jammu and Kashmir, under the rule of Maharaja Ghulab Singh.

Jammu and Kashmir State

Ghulab Singh, an able administrator, did not take long to integrate the three parts of his domain, Jammu, Kashmir and the frontier of Ladakh and Batlistan, into a closely knit political entity. The Hindus of Kashmir for whom the developments that had occurred in Kashmir, after the Anglo-Sikh war and the abortive attempt of the last Governor, Sheikh Imam-u-Din to turn Kashmir into a Muslim State, had proved to be fearful experience, took a long time to resettle new state. No longer under the shadow of death and exposed to persecution, they gradually regained their composure and overcome their deep sense of insecurity. They did not take long to make a place for themselves in the new state,



Plaque with Vishnu's emblems (9th century)

placing them, close to the Dogra state, particularly after the British annexed the Punjab and increased their interference with the Dogra rulers. In the long tussle between the British and Dogras, the Muslims of the state put themselves behind the British. The conflict between the Dogras and the British continued till the end of the British rule in India. The Hindus, who were drawn into the Indian struggle for freedom, stood firmly against the British, which brought them into conflict with the Muslims. The Muslims, whom the British, according to the policy of divide and rule kept, Muslims of the state, on their right side. However, after a decade of distrust, in which the state experienced widespread Hindu Muslim conflict, the Muslims, mainly in the Kashmir province turned away from the British and joined the Hindus of Kashmir, to form a new people's movement for the freedom of India from the British and the people of the Indian States from the British rule.

The freedom of India, in which they had stood shoulder to shoulder with the Indian people and in which they had played a significant role, pushed them back into oblivion. In the Kashmir dispute, which followed the invasion of the State by Pakistan, the intransigence of the Indian leaders, finished not only the Hindus of Kashmir, but the Sikhs, the Hindus and Sikhs in the Jammu province and the Buddhists of Ladakh into the subjection of a Muslim majority state, which the Indian government allowed to remain out of the Indian constitutional organization. Pakistan, which left no stone unturned to grab the state, a long war of subversion in Jammu and Kashmir, which culminated in the *Jehad* that country unleashed in Kashmir in 1990. The *Jehad* subject the Hindus of Kashmir to genocide in order to bring their ethnic extermination in Kashmir, as a result of which the whole community of the Hindus of Kashmir, the last remnants of the Hindu Kingdom was hounded out of the land of their birth, to take refuge in Jammu and the other parts of India. They are still living in exile, their temples and shrines in Kashmir demolished and burnt and their homes destroyed.

Chapter II

HINDU RELIGIOUS CULTURE

Hindu religious culture of Kashmir has evolved as a part of the Sanskrit culture of India. Having evolved from its beginnings in the Vedic civilization of India, it has evolved through centuries of the history of Kashmir. The people of Kashmir are the descendents of the proto-Aryan people who lived in Kashmir and the whole of the north of India. The Hindu religious culture has a Vedic substratum, and its theological postulates, mythology, and legends are a part of the Sanatan Dharma. The rituals observed by the Hindus of Kashmir are Vedic in principle. The form of worship, the *Puja-Padati,* is also Vedic in its structure.

The Hindu religion is a process in time, which is not divided between what is believed to be divine and what is believed to be pagan. Hindu religious culture does not have a pagan past. It has continuity, which is its most characteristic feature. The spiritual quest for the realization of the Lord is original to the Hindu religious culture, which underlines the essential unity between the universal and the existential. That is, as a matter of fact, the fulcrum of the Shaivite monism, of which the philosophic postulates were perfected in Kashmir. The Bhairva Stotra composed by the great Shaivite philosopher, Abhinavgupta reveals the Advaitic truth, which forms the foundation of the Shiva Darshan. The Bhairva Stotra unfolds the secret of *Atam Gyan*, the conscious realization of the communion between the human being and the *Parmatman.*

The verses of the Bhairva Stotra read:

1. "Having become one with Thee, I adore you in the heart of my heart. You are the first Cause, of projection, sustenance and dissolution of the Universe and the protector of the destitute; everything sentient and insentient stands pervaded by you; you

are one with the Self, one and only one without beginning and end;

2. By virtue of the power of your grace, I experience whole of this universe as one with Thee, and since you are always everyday of mine, whole of the (Universe) is nothing but myself ;
3. Despite the fact that the forces of the agents of '*Karma*' which are extremely terrifying, delusory and very difficult to resist are at work, there is no question of getting over-awed by them in the world, for mine own self, Thine own self and the world have gained concurrence.
4. O, Ye, God of death! Don't cast your terrifying glance on me. By serving and remembering Lord Shiva, I have verily become the embodiment of the powers of the Bhairava.
5. All pervading darkness of ignorance is cut as under by the rays of your knowledge which is well-developed and verily one with you. O Ye! The destroyer of death and the God of death,I bow to Thee, I am not at all frightened by the malevolent spirits of Karma.
6. The rays of the truth and awareness have risen and pervaded all the categories and elements of this Universe. I have gained repose of senses by depending on the (divine) nectar of Thine transcendentality.
7. O Lord! When my mind falls a victim to such affliction as cause awful pain to my body, I being one with you, a shower of transcendental nectar in the form of hymns comes into being (which destroys the pangs of pain).
8. O Sankara! It is true by observing fasts, giving charity and practicing austerity, afflictions are destroyed. But by concentrating on the supreme nectar of your philosophy, a soothing strea flows in my mind.
9. After having attained your absolute glorified beauty— a stage attained with great difficulty—— my awareness joyfully dances, sings and feels blissful.

The Dieties

The deities who are worshipped in Kashmir are the deities which are worshipped in rest of India. The *Devas* and *Devtas* worshipped in Kashmir are the *Devas* and *Devtas* worshipped in the rest of India. All the *Devis,* the manifestations of the divine mother, *Bhavani*, worshipped in Kashmir are the deities worshipped in rest of India.

Brahma

According to Hindu mythology, there are three basic divine forces or sources of energy, which are represented by the trinity Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva with basic attributes of creation, preservation and dissolution. Brahma is considered to be the embodiment of *Sattva-Guna,* the quality of creativity, by which the world was created. Vishnu is the embodiment of *Rajo-Guna*, the principle of preservation. The Shiva is the *Tamo-Guna*, the dissolving fire by which the world is consumed.

Brahma was worshipped in Kashmir in ancient times, with number of places associated with him. Nilmat Purana and Rajatarangini refer to the worship of Brahma. Several images of Brahma in metal, stones and ivory have been discovered from different places of Kashmir. One of the metal idols of Brahma has four attendants with it, perhaps, symbolizing the four Vedas.

Brahma is worshipped as a 'part of the Tri-murti— the Trinity. Tri-murti manifestations carved in stone were worshipped in many temples in Kashmir. At Vicharnag shrine in Srinagar, a Tri-murti carved in stone stood by the Vicharnag spring in open beside the new temple structure, which was constructed on the ruins of the old Vicharnag temple during the reign of the Dogra ruler, Maharaja Partap Singh. Perhaps, the Tri-murti was placed inside the old stone temple which was demolished during the Muslim rule.

During the Vedic period, deities such as Brahmnaspati, Vacaspati, Prajapati, and Vivakarman symbolized Bramha. During the Puranic period, Brahma emerged as the deity who symbolized creation and the Vedic deities, Brahmnaspati etc. merged in him. Bramha is believed to have taken his birth from a lotus, which arises from the naval of Vishnu. Brahma sits on a lotus in *Padamasna*, in a posture of meditation. His thought process symbolizes Parmadharma. The four Vedas originated from his mouth.



Brahma

He has two wives, Saraswati or Savitri and Gayatri. Saraswati is the goddess of learning and wisdom. She is the *Shakti* behind Bramha. She represents river Saraswati and the deity presiding over it. Vedic deity Vak (speech) has been merged with Saraswati in the latter period. In Kashmir Saraswati is worshipped

as goddess of learning. On the third day *try* of the bright fortnight of the lunar month of Magha (Jan-Feb), the family priest visits, every household, with a picture drawn on paper with prayers for Saraswati, this is called *Gortry*. Gayatri is the name given to a famous Vedic hymn Gayatri Mantra and later came to be personified as a goddess. Gayatri represents the collective knowledge of all the Vedas.

During the Puranic period, Brahma was held in high esteem, but he was not worshipped like Vishnu and Shiva. After the Puranic period, many temples were built and were dedicated to Vishnu and Shiva, barring a temple dedicated to Brahma at Pushkar in Rajasthan.

Vishnu

Vishnu is the most venerated deity worshipped in Kashmir. Nilmat Purana refers to Vishnu as the supreme deity worshipped in Kashmir during the Nilmat era. Vishnu's name is derived from *Vish* which literally means 'to spread in all directions, or to pervade'. So Vishnu is that deity whose existence is in the whole universe. He is the Pervader. He is everywhere. He is the Preserver.



Vaikuntha Vishnu

Goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of all riches, is associated with Vishnu. Lakshmi is the symbolic representation of all resources. Vishnu is also called Narayan. It consists of two words. *Nara* means water and *ayan* means house or the dwelling place. Thus, Narayan literally means 'he who has water as his dwelling place'. According to our scriptures, Lord Vishnu, reposes on the snake coil formed over the surface of sea. So, Vishnu is where water exists, scientifically, where there is water there is life and there is world. According to Padam Purana, "Sri Hari should be worshipped in '*Salagrama*', '*Mani*', '*Yantra*', '*Mandala*' or in an image form."

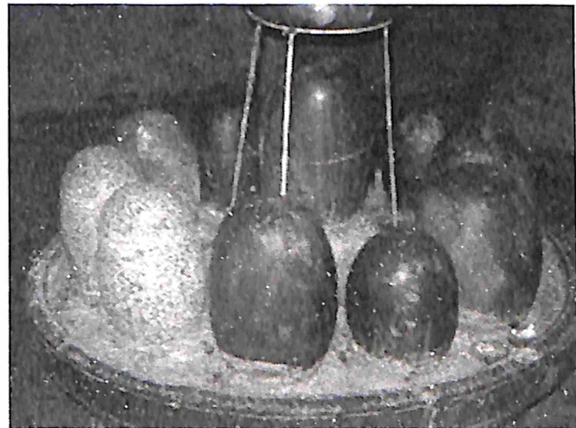
Jayakhya Samhita mentions of the prevalence of the Vaishnav School in Kashmir: the Pancharatra School. The Pancharatra School,

accepted the *Satvatas* of Ram and Krishna, the two incarnations of Vishnu. Shrimad Bhagwat accepted Vasudev-Narayan as the supreme deity, while the Pancharatra followers worshipped four Vyuahas: Vasudev, Sankarastrana, Pradyuman and Aniruddha. A large number of the images of Vasudev-Narayan and Vikuntha were installed in the temples of Kashmir. Nilmat Purana mentions the temples built in ancient town of Chakardar situated to the west of the town of Bijbehara in south Kashmir. The Chakardar temple was dedicated to Keshva. Lalitaditya Mukhtapida built Vishnu temples in Kashmir, among them being the Mukhta-Keshva temple, Parihas-Keshva temple, Mahavarah temple and Govardhanadhara temple.

The incarnations of Vishnu— Rama and Krishna are worshipped in Kashmir widely. The temples dedicated to Sri Rama are larger in number than temples dedicated to Sri Krishna. At many places the ruins of many ancient temples are linked with the name of Rama and Krishna, such as Sita Kund at Khag and Sita Hran, a few miles away from Arizal in Beerweh district of Kashmir. An ancient temple dedicated to Krishna is situated in the Hari Parbat Fort in Srinagar.

Shiva

The worship of Shiva is common among the Hindus of Kashmir. Shiva is worshipped in all temples of Kashmir in the form of *Shiva-Linga*. The *Shivlinga* is the symbol of Shiva. The oldest available Sanskrit text on the worship of *Shivlinga* is the Linga Purana followed by the Shiva Mahapurana. The very first *Shloka* of section II of the Linga Purana, Part 1, says; "The non-characterized (formless) is the root of the characterized, (form) of the world. The manifest, characterized world, is called *Prakrti* (nature) which must be seen in *Linga*, meaning that of Lord Shiva".



Vijeshwar Temple at Bijbehara

There is a tradition among the Kashmiri Hindus, of having a small

apartment in their homes, which is virtually a small temple and is called '*Thakur Kuth*', 'the room of the Thakur'. Kashmiri Hindus perform the worship of their deities in their own homes every-day in the morning. Shiva-Linga is installed in every '*Thakur Kuth*' and worshipped in accordance with the prescribed form, known as *Puja Padvati.*

Swami Sivananda, founder of 'Divine Life Society', has said in his book, 'All about Hinduism';"*Linga* represents the formless Shiva—*Shivalinga* speaks to you in the unmistakable language of silence, I am one without a second. I am formless....*Linga* is only the outward symbol of the formless being, Lord Shiva, who is the indivisible, all-pervading, eternal, auspicious, ever pure, immortal essence of His vast universe, who is the undying soul seated in the chamber of your heart, who is your indweller, innermost Self or *Atman* and who is identical with the Supreme Brahman."

In Kashmir, we have nine *Naths* and nine Bhairvas, representing various forms of Lord Shiva. There are different temples dedicated to the forms of Shiva. Som Nath Mandir and Sheetal Nath Mandir are two important ancient temples in Srinagar. Sheetal Nath is said to be a Bhairva, but it does not fall in that category of *Asta- Bhairavas* of Kashmir. There are sixteen temples (*Yars*) on the bank of river Jhelum in Srinagar called *Shuurah Yar,* dedicated to Lord Shiva and Bhairvas. Ancient temple of Shiva, Sadashiva temple in Purshyar, on the banks of Jhelum, at Habakadal, Srinagar finds mention in the Puranas of Kashmir. Most celebrated of the *Shiv tirthas*, in Kashmir is the pilgrimage to shrine of cave temple of Sri Amarnath, where a *Shivlinga* of ice naturally formed, is worshipped by devotees, who come from all over India.

Ganesha

The worship of Ganesha is widely common in Kashmir. There are temples and shrines which are specially, dedicated to the worship of Ganesha However, the image of Ganesha is placed almost in every temple and every Hindu household in Kashmir. This practice is prevalent in almost whole of the India. Ganesha is the first of the deity whose presence is invoked and who is worshipped in all religious functions and forms of worship. Ganesha is considered to be the deity, who bestows prosperity and removes obstacles in the way of devotees. He

is the fountain head of wisdom and intelligence. He is also the lord, who bestows power upon his devotees and enables them to achieve their aspirations. He is the source of knowledge, intellectual achievements. Ganesha is considered to be closest to the material plane of consciousness and therefore, benevolent to his devotees. He is the deity who removes obstacles. Ganesha is called Ganpati, the leader of Shiva's celestial attendants or *Ganas*. He is *Vinayaka*—the supreme leader of *Dharma*.

In Kashmir Ganesha is also recognized in his self created natural form Svayambhu image, in stone. Researcher Alice Getty wrote in 'Ganesha, a Monograph on the Elephant Faced God'; "The most celebrated *Svayambhu murtis* of Ganesha are found in Kashmir, where there are three famous and most powerful formless stones which from ancient times have drawn pilgrims to their shrines. One, which is near the village of Ganesh-bal, is in the river Lidar (ancient Lamboodari) near its right bank and is still an important place of pilgrimage.... Getty writes further;" Another rock in Kashmir which has been worshipped from most ancient times as a symbol of Ganesha under the name of Bhimasvamin is at the foot of the hill Hari-Parbat near Srinagar ...." Getty writes; "The most remarkable of these *Svayambhu murtis* in Kashmir is one on a cliff along the Krishen-Ganga known as Ganesh-Gati."

Kartikeya

Kartikeya or Kumara is son of Shiva and Parvati. He lends to the spiritual growth of the aspirants. He is ever young and a forceful warrior. He killed the great demon Tarakasura, and is thus known as Skunda. He is commander-in-chief (*Senapati*) of the army of all gods. He is also called Subrahmanya and is widely worshipped in south India.

According to a legend, Shiva and Parvati wanted to marry their sons but were not sure who should be first one to get married. They decided to test the wisdom of their sons to resolve the issue. Both were asked to find out the most precious object. Kartikeya rode his vehicle peacock and started his journey southwards but Ganesha did not move at all. He got up and made circumambulation around his parents. When asked by his parents the cause of his act, he replied that there is no object more precious than his parents. This pleased them and they

decided to give him precedence in marriage over their other son. When Kartikeya returned after a long wait and found that his brother Ganesha has received precedence over him in marriage, he got angry. He made south India as his abode. He married Valli, daughter of a local chieftain and Davasena, daughter of Indra. Hindus of Kashmir worship Kartikeya or Kumara on Shivratri—-*Hearath* in Kashmir, along with other deities.

Hanuman

Hanuman is a popular deity, who is believed to be bestowing quick reward to his devotees. His worship is believed to destroy all evil. Hanuman himself is a great devotee of Lord Rama and is said to be incarnation of eleventh Rudra. Hanuman is not only the greatest embodiment of strength, speed, agility and selfless service to Lord Rama but equally intelligent in his own right. Besides being supremely intelligent, he is also described as the ocean of patience. As per traditional belief Lord Hanuman was born on the full moon day of the bright fortnight of *Chaitra* (normally, between 15th March to 15th April). The day is celebrated as the '*Hanumat Jayanti*'. The 'Hanumat Purana' says that his real name was *'Sunder'*, meaning beautiful. Hence the portion of the Ram-Katha where his role is prominent is called '*Sunder Kanda'* in both popular versions; 'Ramayan' by Valmiki and 'Sri Ram-Charitmanas' by Tulsidas. Sant Tulsidas's life history reveals that he had become an arch devotee of Lord Hanuman. It is also believed that by his grace Tulsi had *Darshan* of his chosen deity Lord Rama. The *Darshan* took place in 'Chitrakoota' where Tulsidas was residing. In the very first case, Tulsidas did see two princes trotting away on the horse but he failed to recognize them. To avoid such lapse, at Chitrakoot, Hanuman ji, thought of giving advance information to Tulsi, who was sitting before the main arch of the temple and grinding sandalwood paste. Soon he found two very comely young boys attired like princes asking him to give a little of the sandalwood paste to mark their forehead. At that very moment a parrot (Lord Hanuman) sitting atop the high branch of a tree, uttered the following *Doha* (couplet);

" Citrakoot ke ghat par, Bhayee santan ki bheer,
Tulsidas chandan ghisen, Tilak deta Raghuveer."

(On the ghats of Chitrakoot, Tulsidas is grinding sandalwood to a paste form, sitting amidst the crowd of the saints and holy persons, and Lord Raghuveer is getting that paste to mark his forehead).



Hanuman Temple, Amirakadal, Srinagar

The temples dedicated to Lord Hanuman are all over India. Every temple dedicated to Lord Rama invariably has an idol of Hanuman. In Kashmir, a famous temple dedicated to Lord Hanuman is situated in Akhara complex of temples in heart of city of Srinagar. Another important Hanuman temple is situated at Hari Parbat temple complex.

Bhairavas

The Bhairavas have an exalted position in the Hindu religious culture of Kashmir. Bhairavas are believed to be attendants of Lord Shiva and are referred to as *Shiva Ganas* in the Bhairava Tantra. The Bhairava represents three aspects of Shiva; *Srshti*—manifestation, *Stehti*—-maintenance and *Samhara* —-withdrawal and dissolution.

In the Kashmir tradition, it is believed that all Shiva Shastras were revealed by Lord Shiva, in the form of *Svachanada Bhairava* through his five faces. *Svachanada* in common parlance means *Svatantra* or the free will which is the keynote of Kashmir Shaivism. The school of Trika philosophy was founded by Vasugupta. Later the Shaivite thinkers Kallata and Sommananda wrote explanatory notes on several aspects of Trika and developed a philosophical treatise on it. The philosophical structure of Trika and Shaivism in Kashmir are based on Tantras. The Tantras are classified as *Bhairava, Rudra and Shiva.* There are four schools of Shaivite philosophy*; Pratyabhigna, Karma, Kulla and Spanda.* Shiva's most significant aspect is considered to be his quality of guardian of directions. The eightfold manifestations of the Shiva principle in the *Astabhairvas*—eight Bhairavas, presides over the spatio-

ritual organization of the sacred cities. The *Astabhairvas* stand guard alone or in company with their consorts, the Bhairvis.

The *Ashta-Bhairavas* — the eight Bhairavas are;

(1) Anaandeswar Bhairav. The Anandeshwar Bhairava is located in the Maisuma locality of Srinagar, close to the Akhara temple complex, from where the sacred mace is carried on its journey to Sri Amarnath shrine. The Bhairava temple is situated to the north of the *Akhara* temple complex.

(2) Toshkraza Bhairav. The Toshkraza Bhairav temple is located at Narsingh Grah, situated on the western fringes of the city of Srinagar.

(3) Bhokatkeshwar Bhairav. The Bhokatkeshwar Bhairav temple is located at right bank of Dood Ganga River at its confluence with Vitasta, at Chattabal, situated on the outskirts of the city of Srinagar.

(4) Puranraza Bhairav, The temple of Puranraza Bhairav is located at Sathu, Barbarshah, Srinagar, a locality situated on the right bank of Tsonthi kol, ancient Mahasarit, which drains out the water of the Dal Lake.

(5) Vishek Sen Bhairav. The Vishek Sen Bhairav temple is located on the left bank of Vitasta in between Zaina Kadal and Alikadal, opposite to the ruins of the Mahakali temple, Srinagar.

(6) Mangaleshwar Bhairav, The shrine of Mangaleshwar Bhairav is located in Brari Nambal area, a swampy ground near the locality of Namchibal, Srinagar. At the shrine are striven around the ruins of an ancient stone temple which is believed to have been built around 600 AD. As per Nilmat Purana, the area bears the name of Namchibal.

(7) Vetal Bhairav. The Vetal Bhairav temple is situated along the fringes of Rainawari locality close to Dal Lake, Srinagar.

(8) Nandkeshwar Bhairav. The Nandkeshwar Bhairav temple is situated in the township of Sumbal on the left bank of Vitasta.

A Bhairava shrine was located on the side of the old road, connecting the old city of Srinagar, from Razveri Kadal to Alamgari Bazar, in a vegetable garden near deep water well. A number of stone images and a few broken stone slabs were placed on the side of the well. Hindus of Kashmir visited the place to offer flowers and rice grains which were placed before the images. The huge vegetable garden was the land which was attached to the Bhairava shrine, but had been appropriated by the people in its neighborhood, which is Muslim. About a decade before the militancy in 1990, the place was encroached upon completely and the stone images were removed from the place the well.

In the Shaivite tradition of Kashmir, there are sixty-four Bhairava *Tantras*. There are sixty four Bhairava Shastras. The total number of Bhairavas, according to Kashmir Shaivite- tradition, is sixty-four and with whom are sixty-four Yoginis. The Bhairvas and Yoginis are associated with *Tantric* religious practices.

These are the names of the 64 Yoginis with their respective Bhairavas:

1) jaya – Nilkanth Bhairava 2) vijaya - vishalaksha bhairava 3) jayanti - martanda bhairava 4) aparajitha - mundana prabhu bhairava 5) divya mohini - svacanda bhairava 6) maha yogini - athi santhushta bhairava 7) siddha mohini - kechara bhairava) 8) ganesh!ara yogini - samhara bhairava 9)prethasini -vish!a rupa bhairava 10) dakini - viribaaksha bhairava 11)kali - nana rupa bhairava 12) kaalaratri - parama bhairava 13) nicashari - dandha karna bhairava 14) dannkari - shudha patra bhairava 15) vethalya - chirithan bhairava 16) humkari - unmatta bhairava 17) urt!a keshi - megha natha bhairava 18) virubakshii - mano vegha bhairava 19) sushkaanggi — kshetrabala bhairava 20) nara bojini - karala bhairava 21) petkari - nirbaya bhairava 22) virabatra - bishitha bhairava 23) dhumrakshi - prekshatha bhairava 24) kalaha priya - loka bala bhairava 25) ghora raktakshi - ghada dhara bhairava 26) vish!a rupi - vajra hasta bhairava 27) abayankari - maha kaala bhairava 28) vira koumari - pracandha bhairava 29) candika - pralaya bhairava 30) varahi - antakha bhairava 31) munda dharini - bhumi garbha bhairava 32) rakshasi - bishana bhairava 33) bhairavi - samhara bhairava 34) tvankshini - kula bala bhairava 35) dhumranki - runda maala bhairava 36) pretha vahini - raktangga bhairava 37) kadgini - pingalekshna bhairava 38) dhirga lamboshdi - apra rupa bhairava 39) malini- tara balana bhairava 40) mantra yogini - praja balana bhairava 41) kaali - kula bhairava 42) cakrini - mantra nayaka bhairava 43) kan kaali - rudra bhairava 44)bhuvanesh!ari - pitha maha bhairava 45)dhrotaki - vishnu bhairava 46)maha mari - vatuka natha bhairava 47) yama dhuti - kapala bhairav 48)karali- bhutha vethala bhairava 49) keshini - trinetra bhairava 50)martini - tripurantaka bhairava 51) roma janke - varada bhairava 52) nir varani - parvatha vahana bhairava 53) vishali - sashi vahana bhairava 54) kaarmukhi - kapala bhushana bhairava 55) totyami - sarvagnya bhairava 56) atho mukhi - sarva deva bhairava 57) mundakra dharini - ishana bhairava 58) vyakrini - sarva bhutha bhairava 59)thunkshini - ghora natha bhairava 60) pretha rupini - bayankara bhairava 61) durjadi - bukti mukti pala pradha bhairava 62) gorya - kalagni bhairava 63) karaali - maha routra bhairava 64) vishalanka – dakshinapistithabhairava

By just remembering these 64 divine names one gets liberated from all kind of sins, attain bhairavas grace ,and are protected by Bairev Nath.

Sun

In ancient Kashmir, worship of the Sun, was common. The worship of Sun was widespread all over India. There are monumental Sun temples situated in India such as the Sun temple of Konark in Orissa, Sun temple of Modhera in Gujarat, and Sun temple at Katarmal in Almora, Utterakhand. At Golpara in Assam, there is an ancient Sun temple —the Surya Pahar temple. Surya Pahar was a centre of Sun worship in Assam in ancient India. The Dakshinaarka Sun temple located at Gaya, Bihar, is dedicated to ancestor-worship and for the performance of rites and making offerings to the ancestors. The Sun temple at Unao in Madhya Pradesh is also an ancient temple. In Himachal Pradesh as well, Sun worship seems to be common. A fairly large number of *Surya* images, have been found in which, are included three standing statues, relief sculptures, stray as well as in Situ. A shrine was built on the banks of the river Sutlej at Nirath and dedicated to the worship of the Sun. Another impressive *Surya* relief in stone has been found at Gum in Chamba district.

In ancient times, Sun temples were known as *Adityagrha*, the abode of *Aditya*. Brahma Purana mentions twelve names of Sun God, which signify his twelve aspects. The names are*; Aditya, Visnu, Dhata, Bhaga, Pusa, Mitra, Indra, Varuna, Aryaman, Vivasvan, Amsuman, Tvasta* and *Parjanya. Aditya* is the source of life. As *Indra, Surya* is the ruler of *Devtas*. As *Dhata, Surya* creates many forms of living beings. As *Tvasta, Surya* is in all plants and herbs. As *Pusa, Surya* is in all food, it protects all beings.

In Rig Veda, Sun is termed as the eye of the universe, and sustainer of life on earth. The Vedic Mantra, *Gayatri,* is addressed to Sun. *Surya*-Sun symbolizes the victory of light over darkness and knowledge over ignorance. The Narayan Upanishad describes the three Vedas as the image of Surya. The solar orbit signifies the Rig Veda. The flame in the orbit signifies the Sama Veda and the blazing flame of the Sun, signifies Yajur Veda.



Sun Temple Martand (Kashmir) during winters

That the worship of the Sun was common in Kashmir is testified by the mighty Sun temple, Martand built by Lalitaditya, on the remains

of a Sun temple built by Samdha in 35B.C. and repaired by many later kings, who ruled Kashmir before Lalitaditya. The temple was dedicated to *Surya*—the Sun, also called Martand. The Martand temple is situated at a distance of sixty-four miles to the south-east of the city of Srinagar, in the district of Anantnag.

Mother Goddess

In the Hindu tradition the concept of the Mother Goddess, the *Bhavani* is far different than the concept of the female deities of the Semitic cultures. "The inference that a non-combative peaceful and prosperous trading and commercial society identified its cultural belief in productivity with human fertility and reproduction represented by Mother Goddess" is conceivable only in the context of the Semitic society experience and its pagan past. Conceptualization of the *Bhavani*——the Mother, in the Indian context is fundamentally a proto-Aryan expression, not in any way related to the Semitic deities of the Mediterranean origin. The pagan deities of fertility were conceptually different identities, than the identity of *Bhavani*, who in Sanskrit tradition symbolizes the continuity of life."

For the Hindus the central concern was the discontinuity of life and the inevitability of death. India was a fertile continent, and the evolution of the Vedic civilization had proved it. "The Hindu concept of the divine Mother— half part of the Shiva, the core reality of the universal existence—the *Brahmand*—symbolic of elemental energy—the Shakti. Bhavani gives the life, its continuity. She is the essence of immortality, of which the secret is the Shiva. *Bhavani* evolved as the embodiment of spirituality in Hinduism. Temples dedicated to the worship of *Bhavani* are the abode of the *Parmatman*, who represents the guiding force of the *Brahmand* where *Bhavani* is the manifestation of the regulation itself."



Brari Maej of village Murran

The worship of *Bhavani* is infact, the most ancient form of worship in Kashmir. The conception of the *Shakti* has evolved with the proto-Aryan

society from its Neolithic prehistory to the historical times, in Kashmir—the Nilmat era. According to Rudra-Hrdya Upanishad, the combination of the Goddess Uma and Shankara is known as Vishnu. In the universe, the male principle represents Maheshwar and the female principle represents *Bhagvati* Uma. The union of the apparent Uma and the non-apparent Maheshwar is known as Vishnu—the cause of the continuity. *Shakti* is the pure or the purified *Buddhi* of man, which perceives whole cosmos as the manifestation of Shiva himself. Shiva and *Shakti* are inseparable, like moon and the moon-light. Shiva and *Shakti* go together. Shiva is light, knowledge and wisdom. *Shakti* is energy, the primeval force, which express itself in beauty and grandeur, the power and majesty of the universe.




Ancient Shrine of Mata Ragina at Raithan, District Badgam in Kashmir (Raithan means the Asthapan of Ragina. The Shrine has both Shilla like Chakreshwari at Hariparbhat and also Natural Spring like Ksheer Bhawani at Tulmulla.)

The Shakta school, which conceptualizes God in the form of the mother, is the oldest school of worship. The seven hundred verses of the Devi Mahatmyam, of the Markandeya Purana also known Chandi or *Durga Saptsati,* describe in detail various aspects of the Mother Goddess. The recitation of the *Saptsati* is called *Chandipaath.* Thomas Coburn hails the hymns as, "the crystallization of the goddess tradition, the central concern of their articulation being the vision of ultimate reality in the universe in the persona of the Goddess." Ten hymns of the Gauri Dashakam, composed by Adi Shankaracharya, in praise of Mother Goddess, *Lila Labdhas*, is commonly recited by the Hindus of Kashmir in all their shrines;

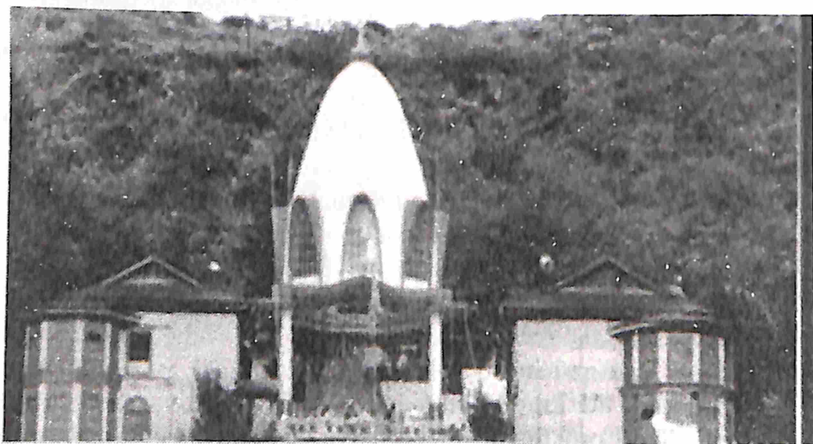
Gauri Dashakam

1. I adore the lotus-eyed Gauri, Who, by way of sport, creates, preserves and .destroys the universe, Who is always sought after by selfless Yogis and Who is a mass of splendor equal to many morning Suns.
2. I worship the lotus-eyed Gauri, the Divine Mother, who gives the highest bliss to those devotees, who are given to mental restraint, meditation and *Samadhi*, who is subtle in form and embodiment of Truth, Knowledge and Bliss.
3. I praise the lotus-eyed Gauri, the Divine Mother, whose handsome smiling face gladdens the heart of Shiva; whose (Divine Mother's) mass of dark blue hair is adorned with Chandrapida (an ornament in the shape of a half-moon or crescent) and whose lotus feet are worshipped by Indra, Upendra and other gods.
4. I adore the lotus-eyed Divine Mother, Gauri,who is embodiment of the whole of the Sanskrit alphabet from 'aa' to 'ksha,'who always creates multitudes of beings, who is of essence of *Shabda- Brahman* and bliss and who has the radiance of lightning.
5. I worship the lotus-eyed Divine Mother, Gauri, who is the embodiment of Supreme Bliss, who is subtler than the subtlest, who pervades the *Sushumna* from *Muladhara* to *Sahasrara* and the *Pingla* and *Ida*, sports luminously.
6. I adore the lotus-eyed Gauri, the Divine Mother, the consort of Shiva; who revels in the sport of protecting this universe and for whose acts of creation and destruction, the Supreme Lord Shiva, one and indivisible, Pure and Eternal, is witness.
7. I worship the lotus-eyed Gauri, the Divine Mother, who sports with her Lord Shiva on the silvery mountain (Himalya), and whose womb the entire *Brahmanda* cosmic egg or seed remains to rise up again and again.
8. She in whom and through whom everything, movable, exists as a necklace of pearls, strung on a thread, and who can be attained through the path of knowledge, I worship Her, the lotus-eyed Gauri, the Mother.
9. I adore the lotus-eyed Gauri, the Divine Mother, who is sporting spontaneously, pervades all the worlds in different manifestations, who is ever auspicious and who is veritable *Kalpalata*, wish fulfilling creeper to the devotees, who take refuge in Her.

10. I worship the lotus-eyed Gauri, the Divine Mother, who destroys the selfish desires and miseries of the devotees, who intently meditate upon Her lotus feet, who is Sovereign of the Universe, and who, sharing the half of the body of Shiva, is delightful to behold.

The supreme power, the *Brahman*, manifests itself in *Shakti,* the feminine principle in its divine form. Mahadevi Durga represents *Shakti* in Shaivism as well as in Vaishnavism. Unless inspired and propelled by her, neither Brahma can create, nor can Vishnu sustain, neither Shiva can destroy. The attributes of the Mother Goddess, are consistent with her names and her forms. As *Shakti*, Durga has two traits, one soft and mild represented by *Bhavani,* Gauri, Uma and the second fierce and terrible, represented by Durga, Kali, Shyama, Chandi and Bhairavi.

The Mother Goddess is worshipped in Kashmir in her various manifestations. She assumes her manifestations according to the expression of her nature and attributes. She is worshipped as a part of the Shiva in the manifestation of Uma. The shrine dedicated to Goddess Uma is located at Uma Nagri, situated in south Kashmir.



Sharika Devi Temple, Srinagar, Kashmir]

The Mother Goddess is worshipped as *Shakti*— the primeval force in the manifestation of Sharika Devi. The shrine of Sharika Devi, one of the most venerated shrines of the Hindus of Kashmir, is located at Chakreshwari, on the western spur of the Hari Parbat hill in Srinagar. The Hindus of Kashmir call the Chakreshwari shrine as the temple of *'Haari'*.

The Mother Goddess is worshipped as the force which sustains the universe in the manifestation of Raginya Bhagwati. The shrine of Raginya Bhagwati is situated at Tulmul, at a short distance from

Srinagar, in the north of Kashmir. It is a very famous place of pilgrimage for the Hindus of Kashmir, living all over India.

The Mother Goddess is worshipped as the consciousness of knowledge—the enlightment which removes ignorance, in the form of Sarada and Saraswati. The shrine dedicated to Sarada is located at a place Sharadi, which is situated in the part of the north Kashmir, under the occupation of Pakistan. The Sarada temple built in stone stands on a low hill-feature on the confluence of the rivers Kishen Ganga and Madhumati, at a place Shardi. The Sarada temple is in ruins now, standing a mute testimony to dedication of the Hindus of Kashmir to the Goddess of all knowledge—Saraswati.

The Mother Goddess manifests herself as the essential energy in the form of Jawala Bhagawati. The shrine dedicated to Jawala Bhagawati is located at Khrew, near the township of Pampore in south Kashmir.

Mother Goddess is worshipped in the manifestation of Zyestha Bhagawati, the form Shiva gave to *Shakti* to destroy the *Assuras* who kept Lakshmi in captivity in the aftermath of the churning of the *Khir Sagar*—the *Amrit Manthan*, in order to secure the sacred *Amrit*. The shrine dedicated to the worship of Zyestha Bagawati is located atop the eastern spur of the Shankaracharya hill in Srinagar.



Maha Kali

As a manifestation of absolute time— the *Kaala*, the Mother Goddess assumes the form of Mahakali. A massive stone temple dedicated to the worship of Mahakali, built on the right bank of Jhelum, in Srinagar, was demolished during the reign of the Muslim ruler Sikandar. Only the ruins remain behind. Mahakali is also worshipped in Kashmir as Badar Kali. The legend says, Badar Kali the embodiment of Maha Kali came from Bengal in pursuit of demons and destroyed them

in the village Wadipora in Handawara district of Kashmir.

Bhima Devi is another form of Mother Goddess which is worshipped in Kashmir. The shrine dedicated to the worship of Bhima Devi is lying in ruins in the village of Theid and Brain, situated on the eastern bank of the Dal Lake in Srinagar.

Beda Devi is another manifestation of the Goddess Saraswati. The ruins of the temple dedicated to Beda Devi are lying on the side of the route from Durdagam, Pir Panjal pass on the old Mughal road, to Shopian in Kashmir. There is a fresh water spring amidst the ruins. The Beda Devi shrine is a place of pilgrimage for Hindus of Kashmir and is also known by the name of Ganga-Beda Tirtha.



Maha Rajini Temple, Tulmul

The Mother Goddess is worshipped in her manifestation of Rajni Devi at Tulmul. She is Ishet Devi of Kashmiri Pandit. The Mother Goddess is also worshipped in her manifestation of Shiva Bhagawati. She is a form of Uma, consort of Lord Shiva. Ashrine dedicated to the worship of Shiva Bhagawati, known as the shrine of Kulavagisvari, is located in Akingam village of Kulgam district in south Kashmir. Another Shakti temple known as Bhuwaneshvari is located at Chandpora, Harvan in Srinagar. Tripursundari is a manifestation of the Mother Goddess. She is worshipped in the form of Bala Devi in Kashmir. Like Shiva, Tripursundri has a third eye and a crescent of the moon above her forehead. In her two hands Tripursundri has the book and the rosary. Her other two hands are in Abhay and Dhyan Mudra. The shrine dedicated to her worship is known as Bala Devi. Shrine and is located at Balhama, thirteen kilometers away from Srinagar, near the township of Pampore in south Kashmir.

Chapter III

RELIGIOUS SHRINES AND TIRTHAS

The Hindu temples and religious shrines and the places of pilgrimage are part of Sanskrit civilization of India. The Hindu temples are not prayer houses. The Hindu religious shrines are the abode of *Parmatman*, where the Hindus worship the universal, seek to experience the presence of the absolute reality at a natively simpler level of consciousness and adore the omnipotent and seek its communion with inner soul. The whole conceptual framework of the Hindu temples has been a process in time, beginning with the places where the *Yajnas* were performed and places which were considered sacred.

The spiritual quest for the realization of God is original to the Sanskrit religious culture which recognizes the essential unity between the universal and existential. The basic spirit, the concept of worship, in the Hindu religion embodies, is the faith in the unity of the spiritual and mundane life of all human beings. It is the expression of devotion and symbolizes the will of the soul to merge with the absolute of which the human form is a part and a manifestation.

The Hindu temples have a sacred place in the Hindu religious culture. More importantly the Hindu religious shrines symbolize the permanence of life and its total unity which supersedes death and dispersal.

The Hindu religious temples and shrines represent the human effort to conceptualize the absolute in the three dimensional forms, which are easily comprehensible. The Hindu shrines reflect the Hindu effort to visualize the *Aakar* as the expression of *Niraakar*; the form and formlessness are the attributes of the Krishna, which he shows to Arjuna in his *Virat Swaroop,* during the Mahabharata war.

There is nothing unusual in the Hindu quest for the conceptualities

of the universe in the forms, which the Hindu iconography represents. The Hindu mind reaches the outer most frontiers of the manifest reality of existence, beyond which obviously, the human mind cannot peep. The Shiva Darshan of Kashmir visualizes Shiva in all his forms, including the Shiva-Shakti form. It visualizes the universe in the form of the Goddess Bhavani— pure energy— and besides that, in all her manifestations and forms.

The Hindu temples and shrines are the divine abodes of the *Parmatman*, and they assume the form, the Hindus have been able to create by the spiritual power of their mind. No doubt, therefore, that the *Parmatman* sits in the temple, when the Hindus worship. The limitation of logic and consciousness are the expression of the time—space relationship. The spiritual experience of the human beings, according to the Hindu scriptures, evolves in time and expands with space. The Hindu temples symbolize continuity of time and space as well as the continuity of the consciousness of the divine.

The icononic manifestation of the divine reality in the Hindu religious culture has a content, which is drawn from the geographical boundaries of the Hindu India and represents the intellectual expression of its generations. As such it has got nothing to do with the concept of idol worship in the Semitic world view. In the Semitic tradition idol worship is considered to be a part of Pagan past. The Hindu temples and the Hindu iconography represent a different stream of consciousness and a different universe of spiritual experience. The Hindu temples are the essence of Hinduism.

The temples of Kashmir have a spiritual status which reflects the fundamental truth embed in the Hindu scriptures and in the Hindu religious tradition. This is clearly brought out by the study of the Mahatmayas, which provide an account of the history of various temples and places of pilgrimage in Kashmir. The Mahatmayas are a historical version of the scriptural postulates, legend and the tradition of the temples and places of pilgrimage in Kashmir.

A study of the temples in Kashmir brings to surface several important features of temple worship in Kashmir;

(a) Every temple had a Garbha Griha in it where the images of the deities, they were dedicated to, were placed.
(b) Every temple structure provided a corridor surrounding the Garbha Griha, for the practice of Parikrama.
(c) No restrictions were placed upon temple entry on account of any social differentiations.

Temple Construction

The art of temple construction in Kashmir followed the pattern of temple construction in the north of India. Sir Walter Lawrence wrote in 'The Valley of Kashmir', "Kashmir is full of temples, shrines, centers of pilgrimage or *Tirthas*. Almost every peak, cave and spring has a temple dedicated to Shiva, Bhavani, Ganesh, Vishnu, and Buddha." It is interesting to note that the Hindu kings and their queens and religious mentors and Ministers, who constructed Hindu temples, built Buddhist *Chaityas* and *Stupas* and installed the stone images of Buddha, some of which survived the iconoclasm of the Muslim rule.

In Kashmir there was a tradition of building temples of wood, but there is not a single temple constructed of wood, which has survived. In the old documents and articles preserved in *Toshakhana* of the shrine of the Maha Ragina at Tula Mulla, a photograph of the wooden temple built on the stone pedestal in the middle of the spring, is still preserved. Kalhan mentions that the traditional wooden architecture, with its decorative excellence, was reduced by ashes by intermittent fires, which destroyed, houses, shrines and other buildings.

The construction of Hindu temples in Kashmir, their designs and other particulars, strictly adhered to the rules prescribed in Vastu Shastra. According to Prasadanandnam, a treatise on Hindu architecture and sculptor, stress was laid on the period and the auspicious constellation of stars, and the performance of religious rites for the successful completion of the construction work. The construction of the temples was commenced with the supplications to Ganesha and Karanjeshvari—the divine mother of the trees, which formed the main construction material for the construction of temples. This provides evidence that the support-structure of the temples was that of wood. Kashmiri temples also had a *Kalasha* at the top. A *Dhavaja* was a must for every temple. The construction of temples of stone must have followed the beginning of the construction of the temples in wood. King Ashoka built stone *Stupas* in Kashmir during his reign. The Buddhist remains of stone work, found at Harwan, Hoinar and Hutamar have revealed developed artistic tradition and workmanship in sculptor and stone construction. The Kashmiri artisans developed an indigenous style of Hindu temple architecture. They were known as Shastra Shilpina.

The temple construction must have commenced in the historical period of Nilmat Purana. There is evidence to believe that the construction of the temples of stone and wood and stone only, reached a fairly

advance stage during the reign of Ashoka and the rule of the Kushans over Kashmir.

The temple building gained momentum with rise of Karakota dynasty to power in Kashmir. Kalhan writes in Rajatarangini;"There is no town or village, no river or lake, no island, where the king (Lalitaditya) did not build a sacred foundation." He built the Sun temple of Martand. The kings of Utpala dynasty continued the work of the temple construction. Avantivarman, the founder of the Utpala dynasty built a new capital of his kingdom at Avantipore, eighteen miles from Srinagar. Avantivarman built two temples; Avantisvra, dedicated to Shiva and Avantiswamin, dedicated to Vishnu. The Shiva temple was built in the Panchayatana style, with the main temple in the centre of the court and four subsidiary temples at the four corners of the main sanctum. The temple had a stair on the four sides, supported on either side by plank walls. The Vishnu temple was planned on the style of the Sun temple at Martand.

The final refinement in form and more polished look, was given to the temples during the reign of Sankarvarman, who succeeded Avantivarman in 883AD.He shifted his capital to Sankarpattnam, present township of Pattan. The temples built during his time, show a refinement in handling of material and ornamentation, which gives the structures a polished look.

By the beginning of the tenth century, the growth of style appears to have come to a stop. After that smaller temples were built. Of the temples built during the period, the one at Buniar, on the Jhelum Valley Road, is still preserved. Another temple, built in the period at Dhethar, lies farther below Buniar. It lies in ruins. The central shrine of the Buniar temple is built in green lime stone and coated with lime plaster.

Ancient Hindu temples in Kashmir are either square or oblong, subdivided into open or closed types. The doorways are invariably rectangular, facing in all directions. The water spouts are, without exception, placed to the left of the image. The basements of the temples consist of single or double space for circumnutating. Most of the early stone temples stand in the centre of an open courtyard surrounded by ranges of cells on all sides which rest upon molded basements. The temples are usually built in limestone of bluish colour. The architectural style is typically local, more or less resembling that of the temple construction in the north of India. Stone carving is fine. In the architectural style of the temples of Kashmir, there are three major structural formations;

(a) Recess or niche, composed of a trefoil arch within a high pitched triangular pediment.
(b) The pyramidal roof and
(c) A variety of fluted pillars with capital.

A tendency to overstate the local in the temple construction of Kashmir is more than apparent in most of the comments made on the architectural style of the temples built in Kashmir. It is mainly because of the strange craving, which the English historians had harbored to link the peripheral salient of the Hindu India, more closely with the civilisation, and which the Indian historians formed after them. Not much investigation and research has been conducted on the ancient temples in Kashmir, their architecture and design. No survey studies have been conducted in the temple architecture in the Punjab Hill States region, nor in Himachal Pradesh, Uttrakhand and the adjoining regions where temples of considerable antiquity still stand as the places of great veneration and where Hindu pilgrims from all over India converge to assess the stealing similarities in their form and construction with the temples in Kashmir. Pyramidal roofs are a part of the architectural style, followed invariably in the regions of northern India, where the snowfall is abundant and the climate is usually cold.

In the sculpture of the images which adorn the temples, and idols which are kept inside them, the techniques are purely Indian. The length, height, width and girth as also the proportions of the various parts of the images are fixed in accordance with the *Tala Mana* system. A *Tala* is the measurement of the palm of the hand, from the tip of the middle finger to the wrist. In the *Nava Tala* system, the length of the image is nine times the length of the face, of the image that is sculptured.

The ruins of ancient stone temples are strewn almost everywhere in Kashmir. Some of the stone temples are massive and majestic. Some of them are smaller, all of them built in majestic form, which is strikingly uniform. Each of one the temple is important in its place and has an individual appearance of its own. At Kulrama village in district Kupwara, two stone pillars, inscribed with Sanskrit verses are all that remain of a small stone temple. In Sogam, a township of the same district, at a place known as Sardikul, there is an old idol of the goddess Saradain the hollow of a walnut tree with a stone-slab lying close by, on which carries the imprint of the foot of the Goddess Sarada. In the district of Baramulla, Gosani Teng situated atop a hillock are scattered the ruins of a Bhairava temple. Near the ruins there are seven tanks

called Ram Kund, Sita Kund, Lakshman Kund, and Bharat Kund. Close to Srinagar, four miles to its north is a village Amburher, ancient Amaresvara, where the remains of the ruins of Shiva-Amaresa temple are lying around. Close by is the Ziarat of Farrukhzad Sahib, near which lie stone slabs and fragments of sculptors which belong to the temple of Amaresvara. The stone temples, most of them in ruins, lie around everywhere in Kashmir. Few of them, which escaped the iconoclast zeal for the destruction of Hindu temples in Kashmir, during the Muslim rule, stand intact. After India won freedom, the ruins of many ancient stone temples were dug up and removed to obliterate their last vestiges.

The Tirthas

A remarkable feature of the Hindu religious culture of Kashmir is the number of places of pilgrimage, spread across the boundaries of the ancient Hindu kingdom. Hindus from all parts of Kashmir and the Hindus of Kashmir living elsewhere in India converge on the various places of pilgrimage in Kashmir, where ever they are on the specific dates and occasions set for them. When Hindus ruled Kashmir, pilgrims from far off countries as well as the places from India came for pilgrimage to several places in Hindu kingdom. Adi Shankaracharya is believed to have come for a pilgrimage to the shrine of Sarada at Shardi in Kashmir. He is believed to have established a *Peetha* there, known as *Sharada Peeth,* in Kashmir. During the Muslim rule, most of the pilgrimages were discontinued. They were revived after the Sikhs conquered Kashmir in early nineteenth century and brought the Muslim rule to its close.

The Hindu places of pilgrimage are divided into two broad categories; first, the places of pilgrimage, where pilgrimages are held for worship of the various Hindu deities on specific occasions and secondly, the pilgrimages which are dedicated to the rites and rituals performed for the salvation of the ancestors of the pilgrims including, performance of *Shradha*, and the immersion of ashes of the dead. In the Hindu religious culture of Kashmir, there is a greater emphasis on the rites and rituals performed for the salvation of their dead ancestors.

The most interesting part of the religious culture of Kashmir is the identification of a number of places of pilgrimage in Kashmir, corresponding to the important places of pilgrimage in India. Many of the places of pilgrimage are related to the performance of *Shardha* for the manes. However, very important places of pilgrimage are dedicated to

the worship of Shiva, the worship of *Bhavani,* the worship the Vishnu, the Narayana. Of the important places of pilgrimage dedicated to the worship of Shiva are the pilgrimage cave temple of Amar Nath, Mahadeva, situated to the east of Srinagar, the cave temple of Harseevar on Hareevar Mountain and Dhaneshvara, also known as Chotta Amar Nath, situated in the forests of Arin-Dardaporain, near Bandipora town. Kothi Tirtha is dedicated to the worship of Vishnu.

The pilgrimage to the temple of Sarada, now in the territories under the occupation of Pakistan, and the shrine of Maharajni at Tulmul are the two shrines dedicated to the worship of the Mother Goddess in her two benevolent forms; Saraswati and Maharajni. In her Rudra form, the Mother Goddess is worshipped as Badrakali situated near the township of Handawara in north Kashmir.

There are two other pilgrimages dedicated to the worship of Ganga. The Hindus consider Ganga as a manifestation of the Mother Goddess. The first of these places of pilgrimage is the Ganga Behda Tirtha, also known as Behda Devi. It is situated twenty kilometers south-west of village Droggam, in the Sukru region of Kashmir. The second place of pilgrimage devoted to the worship of Mother Goddess is the *Tirtha* of Gudar, in Kulgam district in south Kashmir. Kapal Mochan tirtha is another important place of pilgrimage for the performance of the *Shradha* for the dead, situated in the district of Shopian in south Kashmir.

There were several other shrines which were considered to be important places of pilgrimage. Many of these places were vandalized during the Muslim rule and their importance as the places of pilgrimage for the Hindus was lost. After the end of the Muslim rule, their importance as the places of pilgrimage was not revived. The most ancient of these places of worship was Sodara tirtha, situated north of the temple complex of Wangath. The Nilmat Purana mentions Sodara Nag in connection with the shrine of Bhutesvara, near Karanknadi River. Sodara Tirtha is a fresh water spring around which the entire region is clad with dense forest. The Nilmat Purana narrates the spiritual attainment of the pilgrims, who visited the Sodara Nag and took a bath in its water. The Nilmat Purana narrates: "One may obtain prominence among the *Ganas* by seeing Hara Bhutesvara, Jyesthesvara and Nandi after taking a bath in the holy Sodara Nag. The merits of taking a bath in Sodara Nag and Uttarmansa Gangbal are the same."

The second place of pilgrimage is Taksak Nag, a spring situated in the village Zewan, situated in the close vicinity of the Srinagar city. The

inclusion of the *Tirtha* of Taksak Nag in the *Tirthas* listed in the Mahabharata signifies its antiquity. The pilgrimage to Taksak Nag was held on twelfth of the month of *Jeth* and pilgrims performed *Puja* at the spring.

The third important place of pilgrimage, in the Hindu Kashmir was the shrine of Chakradhara, situated close to the township of Bijbehara in south Kashmir. The shrine was dedicated to Vishnu and was considered to be the most sacred of the Hindu shrines. The Chakradhara shrine is mentioned in Kalhan's Rajatarangni, Mankha's Srikantacharti, Jonaraj's Dwitiya Rajatarangni, Jaydratha's Haracaritacintamani and other works of Kashmir. Nilmat Purana and Vitasta Mahatamaya also record, that the shrine of Chakradhara, was an important place of worship of Vishnu. Sultan Sikandar destroyed the temple after having broken the idol of Vishnu placed inside the temple.

Amreshawara Tirtha

The Shrine of Amar nath is an ancient *Tirtha* of the Hindus of Kashmir. The shrine is formed of a natural cave, in which an 'Ice Lingam' is naturally formed of the drops of the water dripping down upon the stone floor of the cave.' Ice Lingam' is believed to wax and vane with the moon. Two smaller Lingams are also formed near the base of the Ice- Lingam. The Lingam is worshipped by the Hindus as Lord Shiva and the two smaller Lingams are worshipped as Shiva's consort Mahadevi Parvati and her son Ganesha. The pilgrimage to the cave shrine of Amarnath is the most famous pilgrimage the Hindus of Kashmir undertake. Hindu pilgrims from all over India and from places outside India, come for a pilgrimage to shrine of Amarnath. Water flows out of the cave in a stream which is known as the sacred stream of Amravati. According to Amreshawara Mahatamaya, pilgrims who take a bath in the waters of Amravati and rub themselves with *Bhasma*—ashes attain *Moksha*. Inside the cave temple, the devotees recite *Shalokas* from the Vedas and other *Mantras*.

Ancient scriptures record that *Rishi* Bringesh was the first person to find the cave temple. It is believed that Lord Shiva narrated the secret of *Amartava* to his consort Parvati and got himself transformed into Ice Lingam on the day of *Sharwan Poranmashi*. The sacred day falls on the night of the full moon in the month of *Shrawan* on *Sawan Pornmashi*, the day pilgrimage takes place. The Amarnath pilgrimage is conducted under the auspices of '*Chari Maharaj*', the two sacred maces which

are carried by two *Sadhus* at the head of the procession in which the pilgrims move in a body.

Bringesh Samhita records, that once *Rishi* Bringesh was approached by people with the prayer to show, them the path of salvation. The *Rishi* advised them to go on pilgrimage to the Amarnath cave. To ensure them safe trek through the high mountain path, *Rishi* Bringesh prayed to Lord Shiva and gave the pilgrims two holy maces to protect them. Ever since, the maces have become symbol for the protection of the pilgrims. Now are called '*Chari Maharaj* '. The *Chari Maharaj* leaves with the pilgrims on the fourth of the bright fortnight of the month of *Sawan* from *Dashnami Akhara* in Srinagar and reaches Amarnath on *Puranmashi*, fifteen day of bright fortnight of *Sawan* for the pilgrimage.

During the Sikh rule, the pilgrimage to Amar Nath commenced from Amritsar in the Punjab, wherefrom the holy mace, carried to Srinagar on its way to the Amar Nath cave temple. During Dogra rule, the pilgrimage commenced from Srinagar itself, but after exodus of Kashmiri Hindus from Kashmir during 1990, it commenced from Jammu.

Harseevar Tirth

The cave shrine of Harseesvar is another Shiva *Dam* in Kashmir dedicated to the worship of Lord Shiva. The cave temple is situated on the top of the Harseesvar Mountain, in the village Khunmoh, situated near the city of Srinagar. A pilgrimage is under taken by the Hindus of Kashmir, on the day pilgrimage of Amar Nath shrine; *Sawan Puranima*. Pilgrims go to Harseesvar on the day of Darb Amavasya as well. Like Amar Nath, Harseesvar is a cave temple. The cave inside is about two square meters in length and breadth. On the left side of the cave is a small platform called *Pranali* on which is placed a Shiva *Linga,* about a foot in height. On the roof of the cave is a carving *Shesh Nag*. At a distance of a yard from the *Pranali* stands the image of Sri Narayan.

Dhaneshvara Tirtha

The other cave temple, dedicated to the worship of Shiva, which is place of pilgrimage is the cave temple of Dhaneshvara, is also called Chhotta Amarnath. The Dhaneshvara cave temple is situated at a distance of fifteen kilometers from the township of Bandipora in north

Kashmir, in a deep forest of Arin-Dardpora, spread on hill feature. The pilgrims assemble on *Sawan Shukal Chaturdasi* in the village Shamthan, which is the base camp for the pilgrims to commence their ascent through the forest. The pilgrimage moves in a beeline, carefully because of the steep ascent. The ascent becomes more difficult as the pilgrims cross the Bhairav Ghati, in between the village Shamthan and the cave temple. After the pilgrims cross the Bhairav Ghati, the pilgrims have to wade through a stream called the Amaravati. Entrance to the Dhaneshvara cave is through a hundred foot long tunnel, a part of which the pilgrims crawl along. The inside of the cave temple is fifteen feet long and ten feet wide. The five idols placed inside the cave; that of Shiva, his consort Parvati, Ganesh and Kubera are between five to eight feet tall. The walls of the cave are engraved. Water drips down from the ceiling from a protruding stone resembling the teats of a cow. The water which flows out of the cave is forming a small brook. The water is considered to be as sacred as the water of the river Ganga.

Bumazuv Tirtha

The cave temple of Bumazuv is dedicated to the worship of Shiva and is located in the lime stone cliffs on the left bank of the river Lidder, in the village Bumazuv, a mile away from the ancient township of Bhawan in Mattan, Anantnag. The entrance of the cave is carved into an architectural doorway, which opens into an enclosure nine feet square. A Shiva *Linga* stands inside the cave.

Sarada Tirtha

In ancient Kashmir, Sarada was also a great *tirtha* and a place of pilgrimage. Scholars came to Sarada from all parts of India to study at Shardi, where a *Gurukul* existed. The German Scholar Max Mullar writes; "it was the only Sarada learning centre in India where there was arrangement for teaching Indian philosophy, which we call six systems of Indian philosophy. A prestigious education centre based on *Gurukul* system flourished here. When and who built this grand and majestic temple at Sarada is not known."

Sarada *Mahatmaya* narrates the legend of the origin of the Sarada *tirtha* and describes the various stages of the pilgrimage to the Sarada temple. According to *Mahatmaya, Rishi* Shandalya son of *Rishi*

Matanga found the sacred shrine of Sarada, after his long penance After the Goddess Saraswati revealed herself to *Rishi* Shandalya at Sarada, the *Pitras*—the ancestors approached the *Rishi* and requested him to perform *Shradha* at the confluence of rivers Sindhu and Madhumati in the Shardi village.

A pilgrimage to the shrine of Sarada was made every year, till the invasion of Kashmir and the occupation of a part of Kashmir, which included the region where Shardi was situated, by Pakistan. The Sarada *Mahatmaya* describes the route of the pilgrimage and how the pilgrimage progressed. The pilgrimage commenced on the 4th *Shudi* of *Bhadarpada,* the month of *Bhadon* and reached Shardi on the evening on 7th *Bhadon.* On 8th *Bhadon* the pilgrims, after taking a bath, proceeded to Sarada temple to worship Goddess Sarada. After having offered worship at Sarada shrine, they descended upon the bank of the river Madhumati, where they performed the *Shradha* of their ancestors. The *Sarada Ashtami* coincides with *Ganga Ashtami.*

Gangabal Tirtha

Gangabal also known as Harmukat Ganga is a lake situated in the mountains of Harmukat range in the north-west of Kashmir. The Hindus in Kashmir have belief, that the holy Ganga, which flows down the Shiva's hair locks, forms the sacred lake of Gangabal. The Gangabal Lake has been a *tirtha*, a place of pilgrimage for the Hindus of Kashmir from very ancient times.



Gangabal Tirtha

Gangabal is considered by the Hindus of Kashmir as sacred as Haridwar. The pilgrimage to Gangabal is performed for the immersion of the ashes and a *Shradha* is performed on its banks for the salvation of the dead ancestors. The Gangabal pilgrimage has an importance, for the Hindus of Kashmir, which no other pilgrimage and *Tirtha* in Kashmir has. The immersion of the ashes of their dead and the performance of the *Shradha* of their ancestors has an importance of its own among the Hindus of Kashmir. The tedious and difficult journey to the Gangabal Lake across mountains adds to the sacredness of the pilgrimage. The pilgrimage first reaches the Vicharnag temple in Srinagar, from where it commences its journey to the village Wusan, situated on the Srinagar-Sonamarg highway which goes to Ladakh. From Wusan the ascent commences and the pilgrims cover the distance in stages, as the ascent is steep. The pilgrimage reaches Gangabal on *Ganga Ashtami,* 8th day of bright moon of the month of *Bhadarpada—Bhadon*, the day *Shradha* is performed. On their return, the pilgrims follow a different route which takes them to ancient shrine of Naran Nag, and ancient temples of Shiva-Jyesthesha and Shiva-Bhutesha on the banks of mountain stream Krenk Nadi. Here too the pilgrims perform *Shrada* for their ancestors.

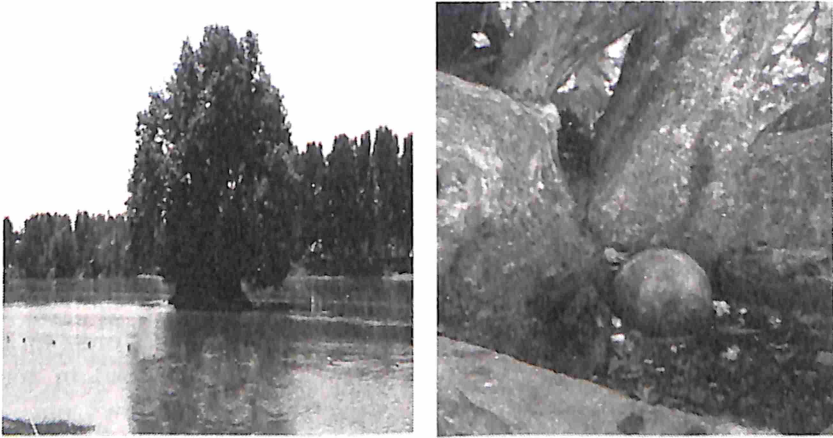
After Kashmir came under the Muslim rule, the Gangabal pilgrimage was discontinued because the Muslim rulers disallowed the Hindu practice of the immersion of the ashes of their dead at Shadipur or in Gangabal. The Gangabal pilgrimage was revived after Sikhs conquered Kashmir in 1819. After the invasion of the state in 1947, the Gangabal pilgrimage was discontinued again and it was not allowed to be resumed for many decades after India won freedom. The pilgrimage was revived a couple of years before the outbreak of the Muslim militancy in Kashmir. With exodus of Hindus from Kashmir in 1990, the pilgrimage was discontinued again.

Prayag Tirtha

The confluence of Sindhu and Vitasta at Shadipur, Prayag, is another *Tirtha* where the Hindus of Kashmir, immerse the ashes of their dead and perform *Shradha* for their salvation. The confluence of Sindhu and Vitasta, the Prayag, has the same significance for the Hindus of Kashmir, that the confluence of Ganga and Yamuna at the Prayag in Allahabad. Those who immerse the ashes of their dead at Prayag in

Shadipur, perform a *Shradha* in the open ground in front of the Vishnu temple on the right side of the river Vitasta.

The Prayag at Shadipur is significant for another reason. Hindus congregate at Shadipur, Prayag, on the rare and special occasion marked by the constellation of the stars, known as *Ashtagrah*. The Hindus of Kashmir call the occasion "*Bod Dashahar*" the "Great Dussehra" and perform a *Shradha* at Shadipur for their ancestors. The planetary constellation occurs after ten years, sometimes after twenty years and sometimes after twenty-seven years. The "*Bod Dashahar*" is believed to have sanctity of a "Kumb Mela." The last of "*Bod Dashahar*" was observed in Shadipur a few years before India won freedom. Nearly, the whole of population of Srinagar and of Kashmir poured into Shadipur and the performance of the *Shradha* by the Hindus continued for the whole day.



Prayag of Kashmir

The unsettled political conditions in the state, which followed the invasion of the state by Pakistan and the war that followed, relegated the Hindus of Kashmir to the status of a subject population which was ruled in accordance with the will and wishes of the majority of the people of the state, who happened to be the Muslims. The exclusion of the Jammu and Kashmir state from the constitutional organization of India pushed the Hindus of the state into background. "*Bod Dashahar*" was never held at Shadipur after 1947, the way it used to be held before.

Gangobheda Tirtha

Gangodbheda Tirtha is also known as Behda Devi. The *tirtha* is a sacred stone lined tank with stone steps and the ruins of a surrounding wall situated on a flattered north-easterly radiated spur of the Pir Panjal range above the bed of the Birnai streams, called Budbrar. Budbrar is situated at a distance of twenty kilometers north-west of the hamlet of Drabgom in the Sukru region of Kashmir. The shrine is approached from Drabgom via villages of Mospur and Kilar. The ruins of a doorway—two carved stone pillars on north-eastern side of the tank. Near the ruins of the door is a boulder on which two Lingas and the figure of a woman carrying water pitcher have been carved in relief over a detached boulder. Nilmat Purana notes that a bath in the Gangodbheda tank earned the devotees a spiritual merit of bathing in Ganga.

Gangodbheda Mahatamaya says that during the long penance of Rishi Pulasthya, Goddess Saraswati told him that Ganga had flowed out from a mountain in the forest of Behda, because of which a holy pilgrimage to Gangodbheda will be formed. In order to have *Darshan* of Saraswati, Rishi Pulasthya undertook another penance, as a result of which the Goddess appeared before him at Gangodbheda in the form of swan.

Dumtabal Tirtha

Dumtabal is an ancient shrine, situated on the edge of the forest on the right side of Hangulgund village on the Naru-Watnar road in south Kashmir. The shrine has a spring, wherefrom water flows out. An ancient Laxmi Narayan temple stands near the spring. Every year a *Hawan—Yagyna* is performed on eleventh day of bright fortnight *Baisakh Ikadashi,—Wahika Zoona Pach Kah*, also known as *Narda Kah,* at the shrine. The pilgrims first take a bath at Naran Nag at Naru and then walk up to Dumtabal shrine, where they have another bath and then perform *Puja.*

Sodara Tirtha

Sodara Tirtha, the *tirtha* of the present Naran Nag, has been an important center of pilgrimage for the Hindus of Kashmir from ancient

time. Nilmat Purana mentions Sodara Nag, now known as Naran Nag in connection with shrine of Bhutesvara, now Bhutesha and Kankavahini River. According to the Harmukat Ganga Mahatamaya, the region around Sodara Nag was also known as Bhuteshvara, presently Bhutesha. The mountain stream, of Kanaknai, now known as Karank Nadi, which flows out of the Gangabal Lake, runs along the south of the Sodara Tirtha.



Sodara Tirtha in Ruins

The Sodara Nag is located in the north of the Wangath temple complex. It is a rectangular structure with a rocky edge forming its northern side. The other three sides are built in dressed and polished masonry in a stepped form. A few *Lingas* are carved on the rocky side. The *Lingas* date to fifth and sixth century A.D. The spring evidently is of prehistoric origin. A tank is scooped out for storing the water and is lined with ancient stone slabs. Describing the merits of taking a bath in the Sodara Nag, Nilmat Purana says, that the bath in the Nag purifies the soul and the body. "one may obtain prominence among the *Ganas* by seeing Hara Bhutesvara, Jyesthesvara and Nandi after taking a bath in the holy Sodara Nag. The merits of taking a bath in Sodara Nag and Uttarmansa, Gangbal are same." Nilmat Purana further adds, that the Sodara tirtha, lies at the outer most limit of Nandikseta or Nandisaksetra — the sacred territory; from the lakes on the Harmukta down to Bhutesvara.

Gudar Tirtha

Gudar is an ancient *tirtha* of the Hindus of Kashmir, believed to be built sometime in 2450-2500B.C.The *tirtha* is situated on the Gudar hill, which is a part of the Pir Panjal mountain range. Gudar is a small village in the Kulgam district of Kashmir. In the pine groove above the Gudar village, water sprouts out of a rock which has formation of cow's mouth—called *Gomukh,* and collects in a pond called *Kund*. This is the *tirtha* of Gudar. The water of the pond flows down in a stream to meet the river Veshav and is known *Sangam*, where a pilgrimage is made every twelve years, like the pilgrimage held at Haridwar.

There is a legend which is narrated in 'Godavari Mahatamaya'; Rishi Gautama prayed to *Maha Devi,* the consort of Lord Shiva for the holy water of Ganga. She was pleased and appeared before him. She rent the Gudar hill and holy water of Ganga gushed out. The spring as well as the brook formed by its water came to be known as Godavari or Gudar. Nilmat Purana also makes a mention of *'Gudar Tirtha.'* King Nila includes Gudar when he enumerates the famous places of worship of Kashmir to Chandra Deva.

The Gudar pilgrimage starts on the first of *Navratra* in the month of *Chaitra*. It is made on Thursday, as it is believed, that *Maha Devi* appeared to *Rishi* Gautama on Thursday. The pilgrims ascend the Gudar hill through the Gudar village, to reach the holy spring. After offering prayers at the spring, they descend from the other side to reach the *Sangam* —the confluence of the Godavari stream and the river Veshav. At the *Sangam*, the pilgrims take a bath and then perform *Shradha* for their ancestors.

Koti Tirtha

Before the advent of the Muslim rule in Kashmir, Koti Tirtha was one of the most important places of pilgrimage in Kashmir. Koti Tirtha is situated in Baramulla, ancient Varah-kshetra, which assumed its name from the ancient shrine of Adi Varah, dedicated to the worship of *Varah Avatar* of Vishnu. The Koti Tirtha was located close to the shrine of Adi Varah. The Koti Tirtha was dedicated to the veneration of river Vitasta, as the embodiment of the Maha Devi Parvati, the consort of Shiva. The Muslim ruler Sikandar destroyed the shrine of Adi Varah. The historian Jonaraja gives a vivid description of the depredations, Sultan Sikandar wrought about in Varha-kshetra. The pilgrimage, like

the other pilgrimages must have been discontinued and the Koti Tirtha was left unattended for centuries. After the end of the Sikh rule, the Koti Tirtha did not regain its glory.



Shiva and Nandi at Koti Tirtha Temple

The Koti Tirtham Mahatamaya notes that the sages and seers, who were engaged in meditation in the forests of Naimisa, all of them were devotees of Damodhra (Vishnu's incarnation Krishna), approached Narada,— the 'dispeller of all doubts' and told him "about the sacredness of the river Vitasta," the embodiment of Parvati. Narada told them that he had heard Vishnu tell his consort Lakshmi of the importance of the *tirtha*. He told them that Vishnu told Lakshmi that Koti Tirtha was the sacred place of pilgrimage in Kashmir, the place of Kashypa, where all the Gods had met together. Then Narada told *Rishis*, of the revelations made by Vishnu to Lakshmi of how Parvati had taken abode on the bank of the Vitasta at Varahmulla, and recounted to her the significance of having a bath in the river Vitasta at the place of Koti Tirtha, performing a *shradha* of the ancestors and giving away charity there.

Narada told the Rishis that Vishnu revealed to Lakshmi. "In Koti Tirtha, where there is the auspicious Godavari, the pious and great Kedar, the magnanimous region of Vishnopad and also and also the Pushkar regions, all the pious places belonging to all the three worlds

unite with Vitasta, the greatest of the great sins are destroyed by drinking water and having taken bath."

The pilgrimage at the Koti Tirtha was held every year on the 12th bright fortnight of the month of Bhadrapada—-*Bhadon*. The pilgrims were enjoined to (a) perform a Vedic *Yagyna,* (b) *Shradha* for the dead, (c) offer gold ornaments and clothes and utensils with rice and water, *Druva* grass, flowers etc. The Koti Tirtham Mahatamaya says that Indra was consecrated there, on the 12th bright fortnight of Bhadrapada, the occasion being celebrated every year after *Indra Abhishekta*—now known as *Indra Bah. Indra Bah* is still observed on the 12th bright fortnight of Bhadrapada in Kashmir. It is observed as a day of the manes and a *Shradha* is performed at a place on the banks of the river Vitasta, which is known as *Kanimoj.*

Kapal Mochan Tirtha

The other place of pilgrimage for the performance of *Shradha* for the dead is the Kapal Mochan Tirtha. Kapal Mochan is situated in Digam, in the district of Shopian in south Kashmir, on the foot hills of the Peer Panjal mountain range, on the left bank of the Rambiara stream, a tributary of the river Vitasta. Digam is the corrupt form of the name of the Dvigram, the name of the village, where the *Tirtha* is located. There are some ruins of old shrines around the place. There is a spring at the place, due to the shrine, it is called Nagbal locally. On the west bank of the spring, on the elevated platform, stands a Shiva-Linga which is believed to have thousand eyes. The *Linga* is known as Kapteshwara Shiva. A temple is constructed over the *Linga* without a roof.

The origin and the spiritual significance of the Kapal Mochan Tirtha are narrated in the Kapal Mochan Mahatamaya. The Mahatamaya records that on the request of the *Surya Devta*—the Sun, Shiva blessed the place and ordained that those who died in childhood, would be delivered from sin, the spirits and lower births by the performance of a *Shradha* expiation at the place. "The ritual of performing *Shardha* of such dead souls is laid down in Garuda Purana". Before the *Shardha* is performed, the pilgrims take a bath in the sacred waters of Kapal Mochan spring. Then the *Shardha* of the child is performed. After that the *Shardha* of the other ancestors is performed. After the performance of the *Shardha,* the pilgrims worship Kapteshwar Linga.

Chapter IV

MAHATAMYAS

Mahatamyas are an important source of information about the origin and evolution of the religious culture of the Hindus of Kashmir. The Hindus of Kashmir have a deep sense of history which is exhibited by their phenomenal ability to record their history as well as the history of their religious precepts and practices. Kalhan, Jonaraja, Srivara and Suka left behind regular historical record of their times. Kalhan refers to earlier compositions like Ratnavali, which, he used in preparation of his narrative the Rajatarangni. The Mahatamyas are a record of history of the various *Tirthas*, legends, rivers, lakes, springs, their sacredness and their spiritual significance.

The Mahatamyas were composed over the centuries from the end of the Nilmat era of the history of Kashmir to the close of Muslim rule in the early nineteenth century. The Nilmat Purana is the oldest of the Mahatamyas which was composed sometime during the sixth century A.D. "The numerous Mahatamyas of Kashmir are interesting source of early historical geography and describe the topography of the valley, information regarding the ancient nomenclature and various other facts of Kashmir. Among the 52 Mahatamyas, the Vitasta Mahatamya (Nilmat Purana) is the longest one divided into 35 *Patalas*. Mahatamyas set forth the different legends connected with various places of pilgrimage, the merit to be acquired by their visits and the rites to be performed in each of the sites."

Mahatamyas reveal the basic unity permeating the religious culture of the Sanskrit people of India. The routes of pilgrimage, the Mahatamyas describe, the place-names they mention, the rituals they prescribe for observation, the elaborate details of the forms of worship they refer to and the spiritual merits the pilgrims are presumed to earn, bring to surface the Sanskrit substratum of the history and culture of the

religious precept and practice, the Hindus of Kashmir followed. An attempt has been made in the following pages to study in some detail, six important Mahatamyas; the Vitasta Mahatamya , the Sharada Mahatamya, the Maha Rajni Mahatamya, the Haramukat Ganga Mahatamya, the Koti Tirtham Mahatamya, and Amareshwara Mahatamya, sift out the fact and data about the religious practice and rituals of the Hindus of Kashmir.

Vitasta Mahatamya

The study of the Vitasta Mahatamya brings to surface the close linkages between the river Vitasta and the evolution of the Sanskrit civilization of Kashmir, the growth of the material culture of the Hindus and their spiritual achievements. Possibly many Vitasta Mahatamyas were composed in Kashmir from time to time. However, only two of the Vitasta Mahatamyas are extant. The rest have been lost. Both the Mahatamyas narrate at length, the legend and mythology about the origin and source of the river Vitasta, describe the course it takes and provide an elaborate account of the places of pilgrimage—the *Tirthas* located along its banks.

According to the Vitasta Mahatamya which does not differ from each other much, Kashmir valley was a huge lake, formed of the waters which collected in the trough like landscape, was due to the Himalayan mountain ranges which surrounded it on all the sides. The lake was called Sati-Sar, the lake of Sati—Goddess Uma, the consort of Shiva. According to Vitasta Mahatamya, the seer Kashyap *Rishi* requested Balram, the elder brother of Lord Krishna, to drain out the water of sati-Sar. He requested *Bhagwan* Vishnu to destroy the demon, Jalodabhava, who had made Sati-Sar his abode. Jalodabhava troubled *Rishis* and other seers and their disciples, who lived along the banks of the lake. Balram acceded to the request of the Kashyap *Rishi* and opened up a gorge by the stroke of the plough which he used as a weapon of war. The water of the Sati-Sar flowed out through the gorge at Khandan Vihar, now Khadan Yar, a short distance from Varahmulla, now Baramulla. As the water of the lake receded, *Bhagwan* Vishnu destroyed the demon Jalodabhava.

The Vitasta Mahatamya, unfold the story of the origin of the river Vitasta and its many tributaries. The Mahatamya records that Goddesses Uma, Lakshmi, Aditi, Sachi, Diti, Ganga and Krishna had come to Sati-Sar along with their spouses to witness the draining of the water of the lake Sati-Sar and the elimination of the demon Jalodabhava. *Rishi* Kashyap requested the Goddesses to bless the land of Kashmir by

assuming the form of a river, to purify it of the sins, the demons had committed and restore its purity and sacredness. Kashyap *Rishi* approached Uma, the consort of Lord Shiva first. Uma requested Lord Shiva to strike the soil with his trident to make an opening for her to flow out in the form of a river. She addressed Shiva thus; "O, father of the World, I shall assume the form of a river but make a stroke with Your spear near the abode of Nila, where O, Lord while breaking the mountain was placed the pointed end of the plough. By that stroke, I shall flow to meet the great river Sindhu." When Lord Shiva struck the ground with his trident, he made an opening equal to a *Vitasti,* about four inches wide. As Uma flowed out in the form of a river from the opening, Shiva gave it the name of Vitasta, on account of a *Vitasti* wide opening through which it flowed out. The place, near Nila's abode, where the opening of Vitasta formed a spring was called Vitsatra, which is now known as Vyeth-Vuthur.

The Mahatamyas record that, as the sinners bathed in the spring, Vitasta disappeared. Thereupon Rishi Kashyap prayed to Goddess Uma to reappear again. She accepted his request and reappeared, in a village Panzhast now known as Panzeth, near Qazigund. There too, sinners bathed in the spring and the river Vitasta disappeared again. On Rishi Kashyap entreaties, she reappeared again, now at a place known as Chakra. At Chakra too the sinners bathed in its waters and the river disappeared again. Rishi Kashyap along with thousands of Brahmins, requested Vitasta to reappear again. Vitasta appeared at the hermitage of the Rishi Narasimha in the form of a spring. Rishi Kashyap worshipped Goddess Uma with devotion and begged her to purify the sinner of their sins. On his entreaties, she promised that she would not disappear again, and resumed the flow of the river from all the four places; Vitastra, Pazhast, Chaka and the hermitage of Narasimha.

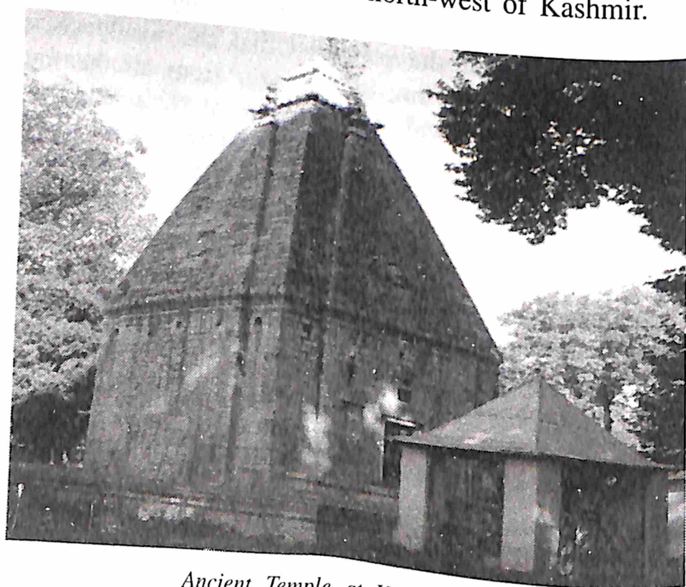
Rishi Kashyap then requested the Goddess Lashmi to assume the form of a river to bless the Sati-Desha. Lakshmi appeared in the form of a river at the foot of Kramsara, Vishnu Paad and came to known as Vishoka, which means without grief. Vishoka is now known as Vishav. Vishav was joined by another river named Ramya at Tokna. Ramya, the Vitasta Mahatamya record, is the form of river, assumed by the sister of Shorash Nag or Shesh Nag. Vishav and Ramya flowing together join Vitasta at Ghambheera, now known as Sangam, near the town of Bijbehara. The waters of Shesh Nag, flowing out in the form of Lambodhari, now known as Lidar, meet Vitasta in between Khanabal and Bijbehara.

The Mahatamya record that Aditi, the mother of *Devtas* assumed the form of a river in Brang Pargana and Shachi, the consort of Indra,

assumed the form of a river, appearing from Achabal springs and known as Harsha Patha. Both the rivers join Vitasta at Aara Patha, besides the rivers in the form of tributaries from Panzath, Brangi, Trikoti, Verinag, Sandran, also join Vitasta.

The Nilmat Purana, which is also a Mahatamya, gives a slightly different version of the legend of Vitasta. In the Nilmat Purana, Vitasta is called Nilja, the daughter of Nil Nag. "The contact with Pisachas had made the inhabitants of the valley unclean, hence to purify them Kashyap requested Lord Shiva to prevail upon his consort, Parvati, to manifest herself in the form of a river. Parvati requested Shiva to make an opening in the ground through which she could come to surface after assuming the form of a river. There upon Lord Shiva struck the ground with his trident, and opened up a 'Vitasti' wide gap in the ground, through which goddess Parvati gushed out in the form of Vitasta. The name Vitasta was given to the river by Lord Shiva himself."

The city of Srinagar and the major townships of Kashmir are located on the banks of the river Vitasta. The city of Srinagar built by Ashoka, which has been capital of the Hindu kingdom for centuries, is spread on both the banks of Vitasta. The old capital of Kashmir, Puranadhisthana, now known as Pandrenthan, built by Praversena, is also located on the bank of the river Vitasta. The major townships of Kashmir, all of them of great antiquity, are situated on the banks of Vitasta. Of them the more important towns are Anantnag, Avantipur, Pampur, old name Padampur, in south Kashmir and the township of Sumbal, Sopore and Baramulla in the north-west of Kashmir.



Ancient Temple at Vijabror

Many of the ancient and the most venerated of the Hindu shrines are located on the banks of Vitasta. Near Khanabal, on the outskirts of the township of Anantnag, stands the ancient *Tirtha* of Vijyeshwara, now known as Vijabror. Vijyeshwara *Tirtha* was built by king Ashoka. A short distance ahead of Khanabal, at Sangam, where the Vitasta is joined by its tributary Rambiar, Mihirdatta the spiritual leader and mentor of the king Chanderapida, built a *Tirtha*. At Avantipora, the ruins of two stone temples are still strewn around. At Pandrethan as well, the ruins of stone temples and Buddhist Viharas are strewn round. Among the ancient Hindu shrines built on the banks of Vitasta in Srinagar, are the Sada-Shiv temple, now called Kathlishar, Soma-Vihar Tirtha, now called Somyar, the shrine of Purush-Vihar, and now called Purshyar. A short distance down-stream is situated the temple of Lallishwari, around which the ruins of a massive temple are strewn about. Farther ahead are located the ruins of the ancient temple dedicated to Mahakali. Further downstream, on the left bank of Vitasta are strewn the ruins of several ancient temples over almost three kilometers of its flow. As Vitasta takes a turn west-wards, the ruins of *Dida Math*, built by Queen Dida stand in silence. The *Dida Math* is now called *Dida Mar.*

More than a mile ahead, Vitasta is joined by its tributary Dugda Ganga, now known as Dood Ganga. On the left bank of Dood Ganga, where it joins Vitasta stood a *Tirtha,* of which few remnants are found now. On the right bank of Dood Ganga just near its confluence stands the ancient shrine of Bhokatkeshwar Bhairva.

About eighteen kilometers after Vitasta flows out of the Srinagar city, it is joined by its tributary the river Sind. The Vitasta Mahatamya records that the river Sind is the form of Ganga, assumed to flow through Kashmir valley. The river is a mountain stream, which flows out of the Gangbal Lake. The river enters the planes a few miles above the village of Dodarhama, where it drains its waters into the Anchar Lake. The river flows out of the Anchar Lake to join Vitasta at Shadipur, a small township. In the middle of the Vitasta, where it is joined by the river Sind, there is a platform, built in stone masonry, stands high above the water level. On the platform is an old Chinar tree. Under the tree are several stone idols placed in the open along its trunk. The Hindus of Kashmir immerse the ashes of their dead in the waters of Vitasta at the Prayag, as the Hindus of India immerse the ashes of their dead in the Prayag at Allahabad. On the eastern bank of the Vitasta, just opposite the Prayag, stands a temple dedicated to Vishnu. The Hindus who come to Prayag to immerse the ashes of their dead perform a

Shradha on the open ground in front of the temple on the river bank.

Several kilometers downstream, is situated the township of Sumbal. The township of Sumbal was built by the king Jayapida, who built the ancient capital of Kashmir, Jayapura, in the eight century A.D. Ahead of the Sumbal bridge, to the left, is located the temple of Nandi Kesvara, now called Nand-Kishvara. A short distance from Sumbal, Vitasta flows in Wullar Lake. The lake according to the Mahatamyas was the abode of Mhapadma Naga and was known as Mahapadma Saras. The mountain stream Madhumati flows into the Wullar Lake. Vitasta leaves the Wullar Lake near the township of Sopore, which in ancient time was known as Soyapur. Several miles downstream the Vitasta enters the region of Varah Ksetra where the town of Varahmulla, now Baramulla is situated. The Varah Ksetra derived its name from the ancient *Tirtha* of Vishnu, Adi Varaha, which was destroyed by the Muslim ruler, Sikandar the Butshikan.

From Baramulla, the river flows down some distance and then narrows down into a gorge. In ancient time the place was called the Dvara, now called Drung. On the left side of the river, king Hushka, built his capital Hushkapora. Many centuries later king Lalitaditya built a massive temple dedicated to Vishnu and a great Buddhist Vihara there. The Kushan ruler Kanishka founded a city on the banks of the river half a mile above Ushkar. Some distance above the gorge, a festival known as *Indra-dvadasi* was celebrated every year, in ancient times. The day is still celebrated as *Indra Bah*.

The Vitasta Mahatamya refers to a place where Vitasta leaves the Kashmir valley as Khadanhara, now called Khadanyar. One of the queens of the king Meghavhana built a temple called Khadana Vihar at Khadanhara. The Nilmat Purana, Haracarit Cintamani, Rajatarangni and the Vitasta Mahatamya agree that Nil Nag, Nila Kunda and Vitastatra, now called Vyeth Vothur, is the source of the river Vitasta. Over the centuries, perhaps, the Nila Nag, Nila Kund assumed the name of the Veri Pargana and came to be known as Verinag. Vitasta has flowed down the Kashmir valley for centuries, over which the Sanskrit religious culture of the Hindus of Kashmir has flourished. Hindus of Kashmir, observe the day, Shiva's consort Parvati manifested herself in the form of Vitasta at Vitastatra or Veth Vothur, every year on *Bhadra Shukla Tryodashi*, 13th lunar day of *Bhadrapada*. The festival observed as *Vetha Truvah,* is celebrated by offering small loaves of rice-floor *Tumlu-Vur*, while the *Sholkas* from the Vitasta Mahatamya are recited. In the evening, the Hindu woman folk illuminate the banks of Vitasta

with earthenware lamps.

Sarada Mahatamya

The holy shrine of Sarada is situated on the banks of the Kishen Ganga River in a village known as Shardi in the district Kupwara, now in the part of Kashmir under the occupation of Pakistan. The Sarada temple is dedicated to the worship of the Saraswati, the Goddess of learning and knowledge. The Nilmat Purana mentions that in ancient Kashmir, "a religious tradition of worshipping books in the temples of Durga," was extant. In *Durga Saptshati*, the shrine has been described as, "Sarada is higher knowledge, exalted speech, expression, Goddess of wisdom, bestowal of desires, and essence of Vedas and controller of intellect".

The temple of Sarada is built in stone, on high ground of a low hillock and was reached from ground by a flight of stone steps. The temple is in ruins and the steps appear to be twisted as if by an earthquake and the stairs are in rubble. Inside the enclosure of the temple is a stone slab, which is believed to cover a spring—a *kund.* Some chronicles mention that in ancient times, there was image of the Goddess Sarada carved in wood, in the side enclosure of the temple.

Sarada was an important centre of learning in ancient Kashmir. Students and scholars came from various places in Kashmir and from places outside Kashmir to study at Sarada. A *Gurukul*—a boarding institution was run at Sarada, where people studied various schools of Hindu religious philosophy. Max Mullar, the German Indologist collected a number of *Sharada* manuscripts at Shardi. He wrote about Sarada; "it was the only Sarada learning centre in India where there was arrangement for teaching Indian philosophy, which we call six systems of Indian philosophy. A prestigious education centre based on *Gurukul* system flourished here. When and who built this grand and majestic temple at Sarada is not known."

It has been recorded, that Adi Shankracharya visited Sarada. It is believed, that he had a long discussion with the learned scholars and teachers at Sarada and in many disputations vanquished them. It is believed after having done that, he seated himself inside the Sarada temple. The legend has that he composed Panchastavi, in praise of the Goddess of Sarada. The *Sharada Peeth* was at the height of its glory in the eleventh century AD. Bilhan the poet historian of Kashmir wrote in the description of Pravarspura, the capital of the Hindu kingdom of

Kashmir, about the excellence the *Sharada Peeth* had achieved. A century later, the Jain scholar Hem Chandra visited Sarada. He mentions the temple of Sarada in his treatise 'Prabhavakacharita'.

The origin of the Sarada shrine and its spiritual importance, the religious rituals and tradition associated with the worship in the temple and importance of the pilgrimage to the Sarada shrine are narrated in the Sarada Mahatamya. The authorship of the Sarada Mahatamya is not known, but it is believed that the Mahatamya was composed by a devoted disciple of Shankracharya, whose name was Madhavacharya. The Mahatamya is in the form of a discourse, between the Bhairavi and her lord the Bhairava, in which the former asks, the latter to tell her about the shrine of Goddess Sarada and her glory. Bhairavi addresses the Bhairava; "O Mahadeva, tell me about the best forest of Sarada truthfully, where having gone, Sandilya got all his desires fulfilled. How, the Goddess who is named Sarada, who neither has a beginning nor an end, came to earth and assumed the three-fold form. O, Mahadeva! Desiring the welfare of the world, tell about her glory. Who is this Supreme Goddess bearing the designation of Sarada?" Thereupon the Bhairava narrated how the sage Sandilya, by long penance and meditation, found the sacred place of Sarada and how he was graced by her appearance to bless him.

The Sarada Mahatamya narrates that Sandilya, was born to a great sage, whose wife was the daughter of a person of low caste (*Chandalla*). Sandilya's colour was black and his complexion personified darkness." The sage, Sandilya's father told his son to perform penance in the vicinity of the mountains of the Goddess. While Sandilya was meditating, a great dark complexioned effulgence of spotless luster appeared. As Sandilya watched the luster of the black hue appeared in astonishment, it vanished from his sight. Sandliya remembered his father, who sent the great *Dev Rishi* Narada to his son. Narada told Sandilya to meditate on the Goddess, in her black complexion, so that he would have a vision of her and when that happened all his sins would disappear.Sandilya, in accordance with the instructions given to him by the *Dev Rishi* Narada, settled down to meditate upon the Goddess whose complexion was dark. Sandilya continued his meditation for a hundred years, after the Goddess Shyamala with her black complexion and colour appeared before him. Pleased with Sandilya's penance she told him to seek any boon from her. Sandliya asked for the extenuation of his sins. Goddess Shyamala granted him his boon and then told the sage Sandilya to go to Maharashtra, bearing the name

Shyamala, where he would see the Goddess Sarada in her threefold form. The Goddess Shyamala told sage Sandliya that," there he would get his form of the Brahma." Sage Sandliya headed for the place known as Shyamala.

After having arrived at the place Shyamala, the Sage Sandilya saw a hut. He sat in the hut and began to meditate upon the Goddess. The Goddess Mahadevi appeared to him and told him to go some distance from where the hut was. There, he was told to enter the forest of *Sarada Van*. The Goddess told him that whoever went to this forest of Sarada, his darkness would be ended instantly and he would get his real form. The sage Sandilya then proceeded to *Sarada Van*. He reached a place, where the spring of Krsnaga was. The waters of Krsnaga flow out in the river Kishen Ganga. Sandilya took a bath, observing all rites. Half of his body became golden which indicated liberation from darkness. The place is designated by local Brahmins as Sona Drang, ancient Suvarnardhangaka. Happy, the sage Sandilya ascended the mountain side to north; he reached a meadow known as *Ranga Vatika,* where he saw Goddesses dance. *Ranga Vatika* lay below the pass, by which the route crosses Shamsabari mountain range towards the river Kishen Ganga. Thereafter, he reached the abode of the Goddess. The Goddess danced with him and then disappeared. Sandilya, proceeded ahead in the thick forest to reach *Teja Van,* situated on the banks of Kishen Ganga. The Sage Sandliya saw the Sage Gautama. Sandilya greeted Rishi Gaütama. The Sage Gautama asked Sandilya, what was the most extra-ordinary he had seen in the divine forest. Muni Sandilya replied, "1 was completely dark with a dark complexion, having taken birth from a dark belly, thus born to darkness. I have now become worthy of being seen".

The sage Gautama was pleased and told Sandilya to proceed. Sandilya now entered the forest *Teja Van,* where he attained glory. Recounting the significance of *Teja Van*, the Sarada Mahatamya notes, "Any person having committed a small sin or a dreadful one on reaching the vast land of the Uttejana forest becomes free from dreadful adversity." Proceeding further Sandilya climbed a mountain and saw lord Ganesha. After having paid his obeisance to Ganesha, the sage begged his permission to go ahead. Sandilya reached the Sarada Van, the divine forest and commenced his penance which continued for a thousand celestial years. The Goddess appeared from the top of the mountain, known as Shrishailla mountain, in her triple form; Sarada, Narada or Saraswati and Vaghdevi, represented by her three colours,

black, white and crimson. The Mahatamya narrates, "As She was *Shyama* (black) *Shweta* (white) and *Rakta* (red) the persons who knew old traditions began calling Her, Sarada. The Goddess appeared in the form of a pebble with three colours. The sage Sandilya fell prostrate before the Goddess. He recited a hymn in her praise. The first verse of the hymn read; "That Goddess who is the embodiment of consciousness and bliss, in whom the whole world abides, who takes her devotees beyond the realms of universe, removes darkness and is the Highest One, only do I accept in my mind the shelter of that Goddess, Who is called Sarada."

Being pleased with the sage Sandilya, the Goddess Sarada beckoned him to come to her mountain abode. As Sandilya, began to ascend the mountain to reach the abode, of the Goddess Sarada, his body turned golden. The sage wondered on what had happened, praising kindness of Goddess Sarada. It was at the time, that the dead ancestors of the sage Sandilya appeared before him and requested him, to perform *Shradha* for them, on the banks of *Maha Sindhu* and perform a *Tarpana*—offering of water in handfuls, to them.

The Sage Sandilya then proceeded to the banks of *Maha Sindhu*, shaved his head and performed a *Shradha* for his dead ancestors, according to the prescribed rights. When the Sage Sandilya made *Tarpana* of the water of *Maha Sindhu* to offer it to his ancestors, the water of the Maha Sindhu turned into honey. That is why *Maha Sindhu* came to be called Madhumati.

The Sarada Mahatamya narrates the spiritual merits of pilgrimage to the Sarada temple at Shardi. The Sarada Mahatamya describes the route of the pilgrimage and the various stages of the pilgrimage. The pilgrimage to Sarada shrine commenced on 4 *Shudi* of the month of *Bhadrapada* of the Samvat era from the various parts of Kashmir. The pilgrims reached Drang, which was the starting point for the pilgrims to proceed to Shardi. From Drang, the pilgrimage proceeded to Ghusa. At Ghusa, the pilgrims visit a small grove of walnut trees and Chinar trees situated by side of the Kamil River. The place is known as Rangavar, Rangvatica of the ancient times. From Rangavar, the pilgrimage proceeded Dudinial across the Sitalvan mountain pass. Dudinial is situated on the left bank of the Kishen Ganga River. From Dudinial the pilgrims proceed along the river, ascending its left bank to reach *Teja Van*, in the evening on 6th *Shudi* of *Bhadon*. *Teja Van* is on the northern slope of the hill range, which is presumed to be the *Ashram* of Rishi Gautma, where Muni Sandilya performed penance. The pilgrims halt for

the night at *Teja Van*. During the night, the pilgrims recite various hymns in praise of the Goddess Sarada.



Sarada Temple Complex

On 7th *Sudhi,* the third day of the pilgrimage, pilgrims cross the Kishan Ganga River. Then the pilgrims move eastwards on the track, along the northern bank of the Kishen Ganga river. After a day's track the pilgrimage reached the Sarada temple in the evening. The next day on the 8th *Shudi,* the pilgrims take bath and then proceed to Sarada temple for worshipping the Goddess Sarada. After having offered worship to the Goddess Sarada at the temple, the pilgrims descended upon the bank of Madhumati to perform *Shradha,* of their ancestors. In 1947, after the invasion of the state by Pakistan, the pilgrimage to the Sarada temple was stopped.

The Sarada Mahatamya mentions two other places in Kashmir, which were connected with the worship of the Goddess Sarada. The first place is the shrine of Sarada Kund, situated in the village Tsatsa, a mile and a half to the north-east of the Dal Lake in Srinagar. The pilgrims to Sarada Kund assembled in Tsatsa village on 8th *Shudi*, of *Bhadrapada*, the *Sarada Ashtami*. The other shrine mentioned by the Sarada Mahatamya, is at Khuyhom village, Bandipora. Pandit Sahib Ram has also made a mention of the Sarada Tirtha in his Tirth-Sangraha.

A legend is associated with Rishi Sandilya. According to the legend Rishi Sandilya was a disciple of the Adishthata, the head of the shrine of Vija Keshva, the presiding deity of the Vijeshwara, presently Bijbehra in south Kashmir. The legend says that Sandilya was instructed by his Guru to go to the forest of Kamraj, north Kashmir and gave him the *Panchakshri Sarada Mantra* to meditate on the glory of the Goddess

Sarada. After the Goddess Sarada revealed herself to the Rishi Sandilya, the legend further says, that his Guru had a vision in which he was told to proceed to the Shardi village where Sandilya was to perform his *Yagneopavit* (sacred thread) ceremony. Sandilya's Guru proceeded to the Shardi village, with other Brahmins of Vijeshwara to perform the *Yagneopavit* ceremony of his disciple. According to the legend, that marked the beginning of the commencement of the pilgrimage to the shrine of Sarada.

Koti-Tiratham Mahatamya

The Koti-Tiratham Mahatamya narrates the spiritual significance of the Koti-Tirtha and the merit, the pilgrimage to Koti-Tirtha earns the devotee, who performs the pilgrimage. The Koti-Tiratham Mahatamya is a discourse between Lord Vishnu and his consort, as recounted by the Sage Narad to the Rishi Saunaka and other *Rishis* and seers with him, who were engaged in meditation in the forest of Naimisa in Kashmir. Saunaka and other *Rishis* approached Sage Narad, who arrived in the forest of Naimisa and told him, "that the sacred places of worship which are found in the three worlds, were all brought to the region of Kashmir by Kashyap himself." Then they told him that the river Vitasta was the embodiment of the Goddess Parvati and while the waters of Saraswati washed the sins of a man in three days, the waters of Yamuna took seven days, the waters of Ganga purified a man instantly, a mere thought of Vitasta purifies a man. Having listened to Saunaka and other *Rishis*, Sage Narad recommended them of the discourse between Lord Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi which he had heard. Narad told *Rishis* that Goddess Lakshmi requested Lord Vishnu to tell her of the *Tirtha*—the place of pilgrimage, "Which has power to destroy all sins" in the *Kaliyuga*—the age of the Kali.

Lord Vishnu told her, "Parvati flowed in the form of Vitasta when Shiva struck his trident in the ground." Here the greatest Sages, Kashyap and others, Brahma and the three causes of creation, sustenance and annihilation, the Gods, the Seers and Vitasta assembled in order to remove all obstacles." Vishnu told Lakshmi of the place where all the sacred places of pilgrimage, and Gods met in one place, the Koti-Tirtha. Vishnu told Lakshmi; "Be so that the new moon-day falls on Monday or even on a Sunday when moon is visible and on the twelfth day when sun transits from one constellation to another, that happens to be the twelfth day of the fortnight, the bathing in the holy place is

supposed to yield imperishable reward. Those holy places which exist in three worlds are all found in the Kashmir range. Those holy places situated in the village of Vitasti, all have their source in the place called Varhamulka, modern Baramulla, imprinted by the image of Vishnu in the form of a boar. Koti Tirtha is the asylum of all those Varha Tirthas."

Lord Vishnu told Lakshmi, that he had assumed the form of a boar—the *Varah Avtar,* to destroy the demon Hiranyaksha, who had kidnapped earth, which was submerged under water, and retrieve the earth. Vishnu in the form of boar raised the earth on its tusk. Lord Vishnu told Lakshmi about Goddess Shailja—Parvati, who assumed the form of a rock and is worshipped on the banks of the river Vitasta. Recounting the discourse between Lord Vishnu and Lakshmi, Narada recounts to Saunaka and other *Rishis*, the spiritual significance of Koti-Tiratha as enumerated by Vishnu. Lord Vishnu describes the spiritual significance of the Koti-Tirtha in the following words;" In the Koti-Tirtha a person should give in charity whatever objects that are dearest to him, after making ablution and particularly after performing the *Sharada*. Having invited the respectable Brahmans, one should donate alms to them in numerous ways. There in that holy place, one should not commit violence; one should avoid union with woman. One is rid of fear and disease by talking about that holy *Tirtha.* "One should worship the brook by numerous and varied auspicious substances, by gold and objects of pearl and also by bracelets and the armlets, doing so a man will always be freed from great sins. The Gods and the forefathers will remain gratified for hundred *Kalpas;* there is no doubt about this. Therefore, in Koti-Tirtha and in Varaha region a man should always perform righteous deeds; give charity to the best of one's capacity conducive to the happiness in this world as well as in the other."

Narada told Rishi Saunaka and the *Rishis* with him, that Vishnu told Goddess Lakshmi, that in older times, at the time of the consecration of Indira, crores of pious places assembled in the Varah region. River Vitasta conjunct with the Koti-Tirtha, Indra's cow Surbhi came along with him to Koti-Tirtha. ."*Kinners* (the demigods) *Siddhas* (the accomplished) *Gandharva* (tribe of musicians) *Pannaga* (the serpents) *Uraga* (the serpents) *Rakshasas* (the demons) *Saritah* (the rivers) *Sagara* (the oceans) along with attendants of Rudra (Shiva) Nagas (demigods) Matragana (all the gods) consecrated (Shakra) i.e., Indra, hosts of celestial damsels danced. At the occasion of the consecration of Indra, (Vidyadhar Charaj) Yaksha Kushmand, and the Bhairava, all

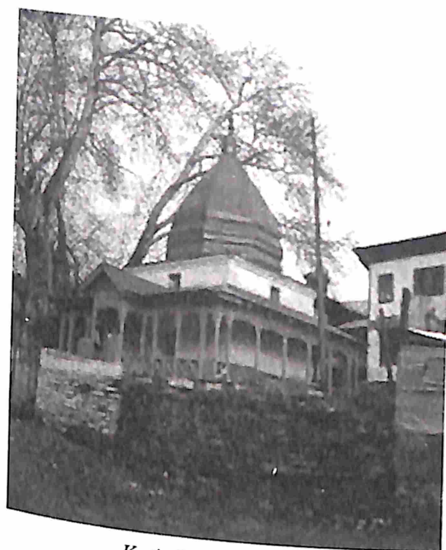
arrived there together in Koti Tirtha". Holy water was sprinkled on the head of Indra on twelfth bright fortnight of the month of *Bhadrapada*, which was the day Indra was consecrated. Surbhi, Indra's cow, slipped on the rock and fell into Vitasta and went straight to heaven. Where she slipped, she left the mark of her hoof on the rock. The rock with print of the hoof is known as the Kamdenu. Lord Vishnu told Goddess Lakshmi that the place where Surbhi slipped into Vitasta is the most sacred place in the Koti-Tirtha.

Vishnu told Lakshmi, "When a person takes bath in Dhenu Tirtha, when he performs the rite of *Shardha* in the great holy place of Dhenupada and when he touches the water of Vitasta, he attains the same merit as results by performing Chandrayana, fast regulated by moon - the intake of food being diminished every day by mouthful for the dark fortnight and increased in like manner during the bright fortnight".

The Koti-Tiratham Mahatamya records that Vishnu told Lakshmi that other place, which has the power to destroy all the evils and sins of *Kaliyuga* never existed, "nor shall ever be in heaven or on earth or in the sky or the void of space." Lord Vishnu told Lakshmi, "The sacred place starting from the Dhenu Tirtha up to the Urva Tirtha is Vitasta which destroys the sins of men committed even in previous births. Beyond this is said to be the ordinary Vitasta. In this pious region Varha-Mulka it is (Vitasta) the annihilator of all sins. O Goddess by taking bath in it, offering charity, by prayers and propitiation, it grants great virtues".

When Goddess Lakshmi asks Vishnu about the pilgrimage to Koti-Tirtha, the Lord tells her," First of all one should do an act of special worship, there, with recitation, perform ceremony in which oblations are offered to the Fire God and others. O dear! one should do veneration of Koti-Tirtha by offering clothes and ornaments, gold and silver ornaments dipped in milk, chanting Vedic incantations and mystical verses (of Tantras) in various ways. Placing grains of food in a vessel made of bronze, one should propitiate the Goddess with the offerings of libation (water mixed with rice, Durva-grass, flowers and honey) flowers, incense, lighting lamp, light, sandal wood and respectful salutations."

Evidently, pilgrims from all over Kashmir come to Baramulla for such an important pilgrimage of Koti-Tirtha. Apparently, the ancient the ancient *Tirtha* of Vishnu, the Adi-Varha shrine must have been the centre of the pilgrimage to Koti-Tirtha before Sultan Sikandar destroyed the Adi-Varha shrine. *Indra Bah,* to which the Koti-Tiratham Mahatamaya



Koti Tirtha Temple

refers, is still observed at a place six miles from Baramulla, known as Kani Moj. A stone structure resembling the teats of a cow, from which water flows and a stone structure resembling the hoof of a cow are what remains of the Dhenu Tiratha referred to in the Koti-Tirtham Mahatamya. Kani Moj is a place of pilgrimage, where pilgrims arrive on *Indra Bah,* the twelfth day of bright fortnight of the month of *Bhadrapada, Bhadon.* The pilgrims perform *Puja* offering milk to the deity and observe a fast. The pilgrims also perform *Shardha* to their ancestors.

The Koti-Tirtham Mahatamya narrates the spiritual significance of the river Vitasta as it flows across the Varha Keshtra. The Mahatamya venerates river Vitasta as an embodiment of the Sati Parvati, consort of Shiva and narrates how on the prayers of Rishi Kashyap, Lord Shiva strikes the ground at Vitasti, making out the way for the Sati to flow out in the form of the river Vitasta. The Mahatamya narrates how Vishnu, in his incarnation of Varha killed the demon Hiranayaka to drain out the waters of Satisar Lake. The narration of the consecration of the Indra, the Vedic deity and his *Abhisheka* on the bank of Vitasta in Varha Keshtra and the episode of Surbhi, Indra's cow and the pilgrimage of the Kamadhanu Tiratha, show the importance of Vaishnavism attained in Kashmir. The pilgrimage to Kamadhanu Tirtha is still, performed on the day of Indra's *Abhisheka* in the form of *Indra Bah* at a place called Kani- Moj.

Maha Rajni Mahatamya

The Maha Rajni Mahatamya—Maha Rajni Pradur Bhavah—is a part of the Bhringesh Samhita. The Mahatamya gives an account of the history of the shrine, tracing it as far back as the time of Ramayana, the description of how the Mother Goddess Maha Rajni took her abode in a spring at Tulmul and the significance of offering worship at the shrine. The shrine of Maha Rajni, *Ragniya Bhagwati* for the Hindus of

Kashmir, is also known as *Kheer Bhavani.* The Hindus of Tulmul, called the shrine as *Bhavani Bal.* Tulmul is a small village, situated at a distance of twenty four kilometers from Srinagar. During the Hindu period of the history of Kashmir, it was a place of great learning. The holy spring, in the middle of which the temple of Maha Rajni stands, is situated on an island formed by three streams of water flowing out of the river Sind, one of which flowing along the southern fringe of the island is called Chander-Bagha and the two streams flowing along its northern fringe are known as Lar-Kol and Pater-Kol. The *Ragniya Kavach*—-a hymn in praise of the Divine Mother, included in the Rudrya Mala Tantra, brings to surface the importance of Tulmul as a place of pilgrimage from ancient times.

The Maha Rajni Mahatamya is in the form of a conversation between the Bhairavi and the Bhairava, the embodiment of the consort of Shiva and Shiva himself. Bhairava seeks to know how the manifestation of the Mother Goddess, Tripura also known as Dvitya and Taruna was propitiated by Ravana, the demon king of Lanka. She asks Bhairava that she had taken abode in a pond, with countless snakes in the north-eastern quarter of Lanka. She tells Bhairava that seemingly the Goddess was a *Tamsi.* But she wanted to know what she was in essence; *Tamsi,* Rajasvi or Satavasi. Bhairavi asks Bhairava, that she had heard that the Goddess Maha Rajni had taken her abode in Kashmir, on the outskirts of the Harmukh Mountain to protect her devotees. The Bhairavi addresses the Bhairava; "In *Kali Yug,* she is Vaishnavi, strictly vegetarian, in Sattvika form, with purity and joy, in order to destroy the troubles, which is even difficult for Gods." The Bhairavi beseeches the Bhairava, to reveal for the benefit of the humanity, how and by whom the Goddess Maha Rajni was carried to Kashmir and what form did she manifest there.

The Maha Rajni Mahatamya recounts the story of how Maha Rajni came to Kashmir where she took her abode and which form she manifested herself in her abode in Kashmir. He tells the Bhairavi that in *Tretya Yug,* a Rishi Pulastya by name had a son Ravana, who was spiteful and conceited, ill-tempered, egoistic and vane. Ravana decided to do penance for a hundred thousand years, in order to propitiate the creator of the whole universe. He did not take any food while he was doing penance, controlled his breath, standing on the toe of his foot. The creator of the universe, happy with his penance bestowed upon him the power to control his mind and his sense organs. During his penance, Ravana saw a herd of boars being chased by hunters with their bows and arrows. The boars, who were wounded by the arrows of the hunters, and who were running in fear of their life, repaired to the hermitage of Ravana. Even though, he had attained mental equipoise

by his penance, he was disturbed and thought of destroying the boars as well as the hunters. However, respectful of the discipline of the place, where he carried on his penance, he calmed down.

Having meditated on the Supreme Conscious spirit, he was favored with the *Darshan*—a vision of Shiva in his Rudra form, with the ferocious face and with three eyes. Shiva asked him to seek a boon and at the same time, asked him to propitiate *Shakti*—the primeval energy, which was his imminent form. "That *Tamsi* is beyond the three *Gunas*." Shiva told Ravana "is glued with the towering Shyama, the ever-green energy worshipped with fifteen lettered Mantras." He advised Ravana to fix his mind on the Goddess Shyama, "at whose command the three worlds exhibit clock-like regularity and who shall forsooth, grant you all your wishes."

After having heard Shiva, Ravana recited the incantations he had been told to recite, to propitiate Goddess *Tamsi*. The Goddess appeared to Ravana after he had done penance for ten thousand years, and beckoned him to ask for a boon. She told Ravana, that she wanted bestow a boon on him that she had not bestowed even upon her own son Kumara. Ravana addressed her in genteel and plaint words; "O, Great Goddess! If you do me a favour, then reside permanently in my house and always be available to me." The Goddess took her abode at" *Ishana*, north-east corner of Lanka "in the form of a towering flame, in the "pond of Ananta, infested with numerous snakes." The Goddess manifested herself in the form of Shyama, with three eyes, armed with four weapons, the goad, the noose, the bow and the arrow.

The Bhairava tells Bhairavi that the Demons in their worship make the offerings of sacrifice of, "bufflows, humans and with offerings of alcohol and Shyama, the Para Devi accepted such offerings, from demons as devotees. But she developed hatred for such sacrifices made by them. While she resided in Lanka, she saw Ravana's misdeed and was unhappy with him. Thereupon, Goddess Shyama decided to leave Lanka and go to Sati-Desha—Kashmir. From now she came to be called Maha Rajni. As she mounted the serpent king Amanita and surrounded by three hundred and sixty snakes, she was carried by Hanuman to Sati Desha. Hanuman, who carried the Goddess mounted on the serpent king Ananta, crossed the Pir Panchal mountain range at Kapalamula—Kapal Mochan tirtha. Then she reached Vishnov Pad and got down at Madhya Grama. Then she was carried to the banks of Vishnu Ganga and from there crossed the mountain of Durvasthala. Then going round the forests, she reached Khilvarni, which was devoid of water, from where she turned north. Then she reached the village Svanapaga on the east of Martand and finally reached Anantnag."

Thus the Goddess Maha Rajni sitting on the head of Hanuman and surrounded by snakes, roamed across the whole of Kashmir. Sometime she went to shaded Lokpur, sometime to shining Rayasthal and sometime to village Vadipur. Sometime she went to the waters at Kotipur. She went to Chandipur and then to Tankarpur and Sarda from where she came back to Kashmir. Finally, Hanuman brought the Goddess to the place of the confluence of the rivers Vitasta and Sindh at Shadipur, from where she was taken to a marshy place Tulmul, a place where snakes could live and of which "the whole edge was surrounded by water." Bhagwati Rajni beheld the place fit to be her abode and felt happy. She told Hanuman; "O, mighty son of the Vayu, the God of Wind and first among the worshippers and dear to Rama, please, help the snakes by staying here for a while."She told Hanuman, "to creep in the marsh softly" while she would rest under the shadow of the huge tree.

The Maharajni Mahatamya continues the narrative, "Thus Goddess Shyama, who was embellished with several colours, different *Gunas,* different qualities, stayed here for a long time, became calm and composed, with peace and happiness." The place earned the name of Tulamulyakam and became the first Mandla, surrounded by other sacred Mandalas—Bhuvnesha, Chaturngesha, Labhdhvana and Bhagoha. After having established her abode at Tulmul, Maharajni bid farewell to Hanuman—"the dear messenger of Rama."Thereafter she lived happily at Tulmul and "the devotees worshipped her in the form of *Shakti."*

The Maharajni Mahatamya is divided into two Cantos. The first canto, however, gives a different version of how the Goddess Shayma took her abode in Lanka and later chose to make Sati Desh her abode and how she was brought by Hanuman to the village of Tulmul. The second canto the Maharajni Mahatamya narrates that Ravana received the boon to possess Lanka from Brahma, whom Ravana propitiated by his long penance in the Vindhya mountains. Narrating the events, the Mahatamya recounts the words addressed by Brahama to Ravana, "On attaining Lanka you will become invincible through the grace of Lord Shiva." Brahama tells Ravana; "As long as Mahamaya Sita is not brought to life, till then you will have Lanka."Ravana continued his penance to propitiate Shiva and during his penance, Narada approached him and told him, how to awaken Shiva. When Shiva manifested himself before Ravana in penance, Ravana beseeched the Lord to bestow upon him the status of Bhairava. Shiva bestowed Bhairava-hood on Ravana. Ravana assumed terrifying forms and puffed with vanity, wielding arms unleashed a reign of terror for the sages and the pious, men as well as the Devas.



Ancient Spring Temple of Maharajini

In *Tiritya Yuga*, God Bhuta Bhavana Rama was incarnated in the royal house of Dasratha. Since Rama was the protector of the universe, he proceeded to Lanka accompanied by Sita, to annihilate Ravana. Rama had Vanaras, the monkeys in his army and engaged Ravana in battle on *Saptami*—the seventh of the bright fortnight of Assuj. In the battle Meghnad, his son, was killed. Ravana asked his chief queen, Mandodari, how Rama could be put to death. Mandodari dissuaded Ravana from continuing the war with Rama and tells the king that Narada had told her that Rama was the incarnation of the God Bhuta Bhavana and he would take Lanka and Sita and handover the kingdom to Ravana's brother Vibishana. She beseeched Ravana, to hand over Sita to Rama, and advised him to seek protection from Shiva. She told the king that Shiva was pleased with his devotion and he will return Lanka to him. Ravana did not pay any heed to the advice of his queen and went to the shrine of Devi Nikhumha Badarakali, another form of Goddess Shyama with his queen Mandodari following him. After having offered worship to the Goddess Shyama. Since Rama was a devotee of Goddess Shyama, he would readily come to the shrine of the Goddess, "And when he comes here with his younger brother and Hanuman, I will sacrifice him and his family to the Goddess."

It was then, that Rama manifested himself in the enclosure of the shrine. Giving a terrible look to Rama, Ravana addressed Rama and told him;" If you wish to preserve your life unscathed, leave Sita here and go home! Otherwise, I shall offer you as a sacrifice in accordance with the prescribed ritual."Rama replied that he would destroy Ravana, take

Sita with him as well as carry away the Goddess Shyama and give Lanka to Ravana's brother, Vibishana, who was his devotee and a friend.

The discourse between Rama and Ravana took place in the shrine of Shyama at midnight on the day of *Ashtami.* Ravana enraged by the words uttered by Rama, "took out his sword and ran to attack Rama. At that time, Goddess Shyama," her eyes dark with anger, her voice thundering like clouds clashing", laughed and told Ravana, "Shame on you demon. I am going to my choicest place, to the most beautiful lake Sati Sara, in Kashmir, in the Himalayan Mountains and vow to be vegetarian."Rama instructed Hanuman to carry," Sri Maheshwari, Shyama," along with Ananta to Kashmir without any loss of time. Goddess Shyama seated herself along with Ananta, on the shoulders of Hanuman, who carried her to Kashmir.

That day Rama told his brother Lakshman that Ravana would be killed the next day, after that they would proceed towards their kingdom Ayodhya along with Sita, for whom "the people of Ayodhya were eagerly waiting." The next day, in the battle field, Ravana, told Rama; "Rama give up your arrogance and Sita, go wherever you have to go and do not through away your life. If you do not leave, Rama, you will have to fight with me. If you think you are bravest, let us engage ourselves in a fight."Rama accepted the challenge. At about mid-day, on the day of *Navmi*—the ninth bright half of *Asuj*, "Ravana's courage ebbed away for the fear of Sri Rama. Struck by the arrow shot by Rama, he was killed. All round the battle field, the *Vanaras*—the army of the monkeys raised the war-cry of victory.

The Maharajni Mahatamya recounts;"Since that day and night of *Puranmashi,* every fifteen day of bright half of the month of *Asuj,* Sri Ram in the company of Sita and his brother, undertakes a pilgrimage to Maharajni in Kashmir, in accordance with the prescribed ritual." On *Ashtami* and *Navmi*, the eighth and ninth day of the bright half of the month of *Asuj,* Mandodari and Vibishan undertake pilgrimage to the shrine, respectively. The mighty Hanuman stands guard there for all the time to come.

The spiritual importance of the offering worship at the shrine of Maharajni at Tulmul is described in the last part of the Canto one of the Maharajni Mahatamya. Narrating the merits of offering worship to Goddess Maharajni at her shrine in Tulmul, the Maharajni Mahatamya says that those who worship the Goddess, attain salvation and, "whoever recites the *Mantra* and worships her *Yantra,* finally merges with supreme spirit Shiva." Those who meditate upon Goddess Tripura, known as Maharajni, are seers and sages and have mental poise. The

Mahatamya says; "Whoever worships the Mother, of the world, by the recitation of the *Mantras*, the fifteen syllable incantation, or by listening to it, his speech will flow like the flow of the sacred river Ganga." According to the Maharajni Mahatamya, those who worship Maharajni with devotion are bestowed with knowledge and unblemished understanding, wealth, cattle, houses and land, sons or daughters, if they do not have any. The Mahatamya says that the worship of Goddess Maharajni delivers her devotees from disease, famines, warth of king, fear and distress and all other calamities.

Harmukat Ganga Mahatamya

The Harmukat Ganga Mahatamya is like the other Mahatamyas as discourse between the Bhairavi and Bhairava wherein, Bhairavi asks Bhairava to describe to her the spiritual significance of Harmukat Ganga and a number of important places of pilgrimage-–the *Tirthas*, which fall on the way to Harmukat Ganga and the routes of the pilgrimages. Harmukat Ganga is a lake in the high Harmukh mountain range in the north of Kashmir, situated at a height of more than 12000 feet. Among the Hindus of Kashmir the lake is known as Gangabal. The Hindus believe that the lake is the abode of Lord Shiva. They believe that the lake is formed of the water which flows down Shiva's hair locks—known as the *Jattas*. Gangabal is a place of pilgrimage to Hindus of Kashmir. Gangabal is considered by the Hindus of Kashmir to be as sacred as Hardwar is for the Hindus of India. The Hindus perform the pilgrimage to Gangabal, once a year, on the sacred day of *Ganga Ashtami*, immerse the ashes of their ancestors and perform, a *Shardha* for their salvation. Traditionally, the Hindus of Kashmir preserve the ashes of their dead in the earthen pots at places, prescribed for the purpose, till the time of the years arrived for the pilgrimage to Gangabal.

The Harmukat Ganga Mahatamya is a composition of nine chapters. The first chapter describes the spiritual significance of the Harmukat Ganga. The second chapter provides a description of the pilgrimage to Gangabal. The third chapter narrates the spiritual significance of the river Karanka, which is now known as Krenka Nadi. The fourth chapter narrates the spiritual significance of Satrugeha, a sacred place which falls on way to Gangabal. The fifth chapter narrates the spiritual significance of Ramaradhana Tirtha and Bharat Giri, the mountain heights of Bharata, now called Baratha. The sixth chapter gives a description of the Brahmasara, Mahisi Marg and Drsad Ksetra.

The seventh chapter narrates the spiritual significance of Hansdwara and Asruksetra. The eighth chapter provides a description of the pilgrimage to Kaulasara. The ninth chapter narrates the spiritual significance of the Nandiksetra and Mahakala Sarovara. The concluding part of the Harmukat Ganga Mahatamya concludes the narration of the spiritual significance of Harmukat Ganga and the pilgrimage to the Harmukat Ganga.

The first chapter of the Mahatamya recounts the disappearance of Ganga due to her distress on the feeling of jealousy Goddess Parvati harbored for her flowing down the matted hairs of Shiva and thus being in his company continuously without any break. Shiva praises Ganga and tells her that she will purify numerous people, who bathe in her water or drink it. "The holy river Bagirathi, sullied by having into it the bones of the sinners and also the rivers along with lakes and seas should come to and get purified with its contact in the holy month of *Bhadrapeda* when the sun is in the Simha constellation's Maheshwari! Listen on the eighth of *Bhadrapeda* whosoever, bathes, donates, performs penance, religious offerings and throwing of bones here according to the rites, the merit of that (man) becomes hundred times." Shiva tells Parvati that the water of the Gangbal Lake is formed of the water of Ganga flowing down the matted locks of his hair. "There is no better sacred place, not higher than this, no better virtue, not even sacrifice, prayer and even religious offering—the *Homa*, than the water fallen from the crown. What is the use of saying more in the Kali age—*Kali Yuga,* a sinner should perform the pilgrimage of Mukuta Ganga (Ganagbal) with great devotion. O Devi! In Shiva's ordinance, merit of Mukuta Ganga, where Karanka Ksetra, as also the place known as Satrugeha and Ramara Dhana Tirtha and the auspicious Bharata Giri (mountain) and the Disada Ksetra of Bhargara in the form of tonsure of hair is situated firmly and also Mahisipaddhati and Brahma Sarovara, Hansdwara, Kraunchandara and also Arubindo (is great).

The Mahatamya records that the, Mukuta Ganga is destroyer of great sins, and "Hundred times more important than Haridwar." The Mahatamya enjoins that the journey here should be performed with great care by those desirous of salvation. Interestingly the Mahatamya records,"A man or woman taking bath in Ganga Sarovara—Gangabal, attains great merit." The pilgrimage to Gangabal, its spiritual significance, the route the pilgrimage takes and the rites required to be performed in the pilgrimage are described in the second chapter of the Mahatamya. Each pilgrim to Uttar Ganga, as Gangabal is named in the beginning of the chapter, is required to perform *Shradha* for the

deceased ancestor, at an auspicious time at his home. After the performance of the *Shradha*, the *Asthis*—ashes of the deceased ancestor, are placed on a lotus leaf, in accordance with the prescribed rites." Then revering them with *Darbha* grass and curd etc., Also with black sesame and with mustard seeds and then placing them with linen and (then) worshipping Vinayak (Ganesha) with Vedic Mantras, according to rites, (the pilgrim) then after coming out of the house, should move towards the north. The pilgrimage proceeds on the highway from Srinagar to Sonamarg road. The pilgrims bound for Gangabal usually begin assembling at Vicharnag shrine, situated on the outskirts of the Srinagar city.

From Vicharnag, the pilgrimage proceeds to Ambhoruha Vana, now known as Umber-hear, is situated at a distance of a few kilometers from Vicharnag. At Umberhear, the pilgrims take a bath in the waters of Padmahsha and "Hiranya Ganga", and then pilgrims proceed to Vijihashram, now known as Beehom. After taking a bath in the spring there, the pilgrims proceed on to "Ganderva Pura", now known as Ganderbal. After taking a bath there, the pilgrimage proceeds on to Sadasi. After making obeisance there, the pilgrims proceed on to Vatyaligrama. At Vatyaligrama, the pilgrims take a bath and perform a *Shradha* for the expiation of their ancestors. From Vatyaligrama, the pilgrimage proceeds on to "Kranka Tirtha", now known as Kranka Nadi. At Kranka Tirtha, the pilgrims consecrate the ashes with the waters of the Kranka Nadi and perform *Shradha* for the dead ancestors. From the Kranka Tirtha, the pilgrims proceed on to the sacred place of pilgrimage, Ramaradana, where they take a bath and after resting for some time, commence the arduous track up the steep mountainside of the Bharata, now called Bartha.

From Ramaradana, the pilgrims reach the second stage of their pilgrimage, which is known as *Yama Haer*. The place is about six kilometers distance from Ramradana. *Yama Haer* in Kashmiri language means the "Lader of Yama-Lord of Death." *Yama Haer* is a steep ascent which leads to Mahesi-Paaddhati, from where the pilgrimage proceeds on to Brahmsar, the third stage of the pilgrimage. Brahmsar is a lake, of which the water appears to be of black hue. The Brahmsar is considered to be very sacred by the Hindus.

From Brahmsar, the pilgrimage proceeds on to Hamsdwar, a serene and a quite place. It is surrounded by snow-clad mountains and is believed to be the sacred "heavenly gate way to the Gangabal." From Hamsdwar, the pilgrimage proceeds on to Nandiksetra, "a sacred place of Mahakala (Shiva)." From there the pilgrims proceed on a steep

ascent and reach the Sukh Nag, a small lake of warm water. After having taken a bath in the lake, the pilgrims reach another lake, Dukh Nag. The water of Dukh Nag is cold. The pilgrims take bath in this lake as well. From Dukh Nag, a five kilometers track leads to Gangabal Lake.

The day, the pilgrims reach Gangabal, they observe a fast. In the morning after taking a bath the pilgrims perform *Asthi-Viserpana*—-the immersion of the ashes of their dead ancestors in the Gangabal Lake, which is followed by the performance of a *Shradha* for their expiation. The immersion of the ashes and the *Shradha* at Gangabal is performed on the day of *Ganga Ashtami*—the eighth day of the bright fortnight of the month of *Bhadra-padha* every year. The Mahatamya enjoins upon pilgrims they "should make the image of Ganga, united with a fish." After worshipping Ganga, "sitting on the lotus and placed on the copper urn, with four golden, very beautiful linen clothes and ornaments, should offer that to the *Acharya* (spiritual teacher),"according to the (prescribed) rites," while reciting the *Mantra*, which in English reads;" Whatever merit is earned by me due to the presentation of the image, let that be for the emancipation of my ancestors also."

On their return, the pilgrimage takes a different route, along the stream of the water flowing out of Gangabal Lake, which is known as Karanka Nadi. The pilgrims reach the shrine of Naran Nag, where the ancient temples in stone, dedicated to Jyesthesha and Bhutesha forms of Shiva, now in ruins, stand on the banks of Karanka Nadi at Naran Nag. Among the Kashmiri Hindus, those of them, who are not able to perform the pilgrim –age to Gangabal, immersed the ashes of their ancestors in the Karanka Nadi, as it flowed out of the Gangabal Lake. Those who were not able to go to Karanka Nadi, immerse the ashes of their ancestors at Prayag, the confluence of rivers Jhelum and Sindh at Shadipur.

The third chapter of the Harmukat Ganga Mahatamya narrates the spiritual significance of the Karanka Nadi. The Mahatamya recounts that Gods made a striking weapon like a thunderbolt of the bones of the back of Rishi Dadhichi, to cut the mountains. The Karanka, the pile of the bones fell in Prabhasa, on sandy bank. Lord Vishnu sent Garuda to carry the pile of bones of Rishi Dadhichi and immerse them in Harmukat Ganga or Gangabal. Garuda found his way blocked by snakes. He ate the snakes. Lord Shiva forbade Garuda from eating the snakes. Garuda requested Shiva to remove the snakes from his way otherwise he would eat them. Thereupon Lord Shiva ordered the Ganas (Shiva's attendants) to drive out Garuda. Being forbidden by the Ganas,

Garuda dropped the Karanka, the pile of bones from the sky; he was flying in and went to his abode. The Karanka fell at Karanka Gram, which became a *Thirtha.*

By consecrating the ashes of their ancestors in the waters of Karanka Nadi and performing *Shradha* there, the Mahatamya says, the pilgrimage to Gangabal attains its objective. Narrating the significance of the pilgrimage to Karanka Tirtha, on way to Gangabal, the Mahatamya records; "The ancestors attain gratification with the offerings of Karanka water. So the oblation of water, for the satisfaction of the deceased manes must be offered there with whole effort (devotion) of the pure waters of Karanka (Nadi)."

The Mahatamya devotes chapter four to narrate the spiritual significance of the place Satrugeha, which is an important place of pilgrimage on way to Gangabal. Bhairava describes to Bharavi, how Vinayaka and Kartakeya, the sons of Shiva and Parvati, disputed the claim of Parsurama to superiority in the use of arms. The Bhairava tells the Bharavi that Parsurama as well as Rama refused to recognize the claim of Vinayaka and Kartakey to superiority in the use of arms and scoffed at them for their pretensions.

Vinayaka, who is known as remover of impediments and obstacles, used his power to put more obstacles and impediments in the way of Rama, whom the Mahatmaya also calls by the name of Bhargava, to use his weapons of war. Finding his powers to use his weapons of war being affected by obstacles, Rama pondered over his predicament for a long time. All this happened at Satrugeha from where the spell of Ganesha took its effect.

To overcome the spell, Rama recited the *Sabdapatin Mantra*, which creates a better sound, which removes all obstacles and then shot the *Sabdapatin Astra*—weapon to break the spell and remove the obstacles at Satrugeha. The Mahatamya records that sacrifice offered at Satrugeha, worship and penance performed there and Svadhyaya—study of Vedas, undertaken there, have an eternal value," An accomplished one, who bathes in the holy waters of Satrugeha, offering oblations to the ancestors and worshipping the all-pervading, attains gratification and the journey (to Gangabal) becomes fruitful of the one, who goes to Satrugeha and performs the *Shradha*. After reaching Satrugeha, one who worships Vishnu, attains union with Vishnu, having reached where one does not grieve."

In its fourth chapter, the Mahatamya narrates the spiritual significance of the town of Ramadanaka or Ramaradan. Rama performed penance for twelve years, without taking food and water to propitiate

Mahakala. He along with Kali appeared to Rama. When Rama, also called Bhargava, saw Mahakala along with Kali before him, he fell prostrate before them and addressed him thus; "I propitiate inexhaustible (boundless) Mahakala, radiant like *Kalagni*, the destructive fire, at the end of the world, having four arm, resourced by Kalika (Durga) with hands possessing *Kapala* (skull), *Khatwanga* (club with a skull on its top) and denoting the blessing of fearlessness, Om, obeisance to one of Supreme Form, most sublime truth of *Caturvarge*, (four ends of human life), one who has curbed *Maya*, Bhairava, one wearing matted hair (*Kapardin*)."

Rama praised Mahakala as the, "Supreme form of sublime nature"; the real principle; "knower of the nature of absolute. Supreme Lord of curbed Maya;" "the Lord of the three worlds;" "subtle and unmanifested form";" the ultimate, foremost form, Supreme Sambhu Om;" "destroyer of the world;" "one who is in the form of supreme bliss"; "Supreme light" "one who is accessible to Yogins;" "comprehensible in the meaning of Vedas, the Tantras and Agamas";"all pervading";" the great light which inspires the intellect;" "who possesses the three properties (*Sattava, Rajas, Tamas*)";"Supreme of the three (Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesha)"; "possessors of the three powers (to create, to sustain and to destroy)";"who has three eyes"; After praising Mahakala, Rama again fell prostrate before him in obeisance. After having heard Rama praise him, Mahakala addressed Rama in sweet words;"O, Bhargava! I am extremely pleased with your great devotion and repose (pacification of hunger and thirst)" and eulogy". After having said these words, Mahakala told Rama to ask for a boon. "You ask a boon from me, though it may be difficult to attain, even for Kumara (Kartekeya)." Rama, greatest of the man, with humbleness and devotion told Mahadeva with folded hands;" What boon can be greater than that I am able to behold the Lord Mahakala, who is inconceivable by even the *Yogins*, with my eyes." However, O Lord, I ask for the best precepts of weapons, complete in every part and in detail:" so that "I become the foremost expert of weapons."

On hearing Bhargava Rama, Mahadeva bestowed upon the knowledge of all weapons; Mahadeva told Bhargava, "O sinless one! You learn the *Astra* (missiles) of the Lord along with the other secrets (mystic spells) here on this beautiful mountain, strong enough to bear such burden." This mountain is known as Bharata (Bharam-tarate) —the mountain "which carries the burden of weapons and at the foot of which is Ramaradhanaka, from where the ascent of pilgrims to Gangabal begins. After having blessed Rama Bhargava, Mahakala

disappeared. Rama learnt the secret of all weaponry along with the mystic *Mantras* recited at Ramaradhanaka, which became a *Tirtha* thence onwards and those who came for a pilgrimage to Ramaradhanaka were delivered of their sins. The Harmukat Ganga Mahatamya records; "By seeing Ramaradhanaka Tirtha (sacred place where Rama propitiated Mahakala) one is freed from all distress (afflictions). One is totally freed from the sins of his births by taking a bath here."

The last part of the Harmukat Ganga Mahatamya narrates the spiritual importance of the pilgrimage to Gangabal, the merit which accrues of bathing there, immersing the ashes of the dead ancestors in the Gangabal lake and the *Shradha*, performed for the expiation of the ancestors there. The Mahatamya records;" The fruit which a man attains in Haridwar, Kusavarta, Naimi Sarayna, Prabhasa, and also in Pushkara, and that he attains by taking a plunge in Ganga, which originated from the crown (of Shiva); he attains that virtue (by taking a bath in Harmukat Ganga). The sacred places, which are there on the earth, they are in the province of Kasmira and the sacred place which are in Kasmira; they are on the Harmukat Mountain. Therefore one must visit Harmukha with full devotion. By seeing Harmukha, O Goddess! One attains the reward (merit) which arises after hearing the Vedas and Puranas in a proper manner; that one gets in seeing Harmukha. The fruit one attains by (performing) *Asvamedha*, *Vajapeya* and *Jyotistoma* sacrifices that fruit, O, Dear! One attains by seeing (visiting) Harmukha. The Mahatamya records further, "O, Haradevi! In *Kali Yuga* (age) the great sinner, whose (bones or ashes) after (being placed) on the lotus leaf, then kept in a copper box (urn) and also filling (them) with black sesame seeds, O, Devi! Also with mustard seeds, then consecrates them with five Gavyas (obtained from cow's milk, like curds etc); then covering with various linen clothes and O, dear! Consecrates with Vedic and Tantric prayers and thus after covering, lays (immerses) them in the waters of Ganga on eighth day of *Bhadra*, he is immediately rescued from hell with seven persons."O, Mahasani! One, whose bones are immersed in the waters of Ganga (he), breaks open the panel of the door of heaven."

The Harmukat Ganga Mahatamya describes the route for the return of the pilgrimage to Gangabal. Mahatamya records;" From Mahakala waters, Nandi Ksetra and Uttaramansa, one must go after offering oblations, to the garden of Bhima, on seeing which a man is released from the sins of his previous births."

The Mahatamya gives a description of the garden of Bhimsens and Bodheswara Giri, the *Tirtha* of Bodheswara and the hermitage of

Vashistha. The Mahatamya records that Nandi, Bhringrita, and Bhimsena, took water along with various flowers and *Argeya*—offerings and fragrance, to bath the *Linga* image of Shiva and worship him. Then they order the mighty Bhimsens, to lay out a garden for Shiva. Bhimsena took the plough from Rama (Balrama) and laid out a beautiful and spacious garden with flowers and fruit trees, which could be used for worship as well as *Navedya* (offering of eatables to the deity).The Mahatamaya records;" By even going there to the garden and performing its *Darsana* (seeing it) and *Saparsana* (touching) the deity and also *Saparsana* (touching) of the ground, the sins get away from a distance."

The Mahatamya says that from the Garden of Bhimsena, the pilgrims should proceed on to Bodheswara, on their return journey. On reaching Bodheswara Giri (mountain), pilgrims should take a bath in the sacred lake there. The Mahatamya records those on the foot of the Bodheswara Giri thousands of Gods, Gandharvas (demi-gods) and demons are present to worship Shiva. The *Gandharvas,* the Mahatamya records, are the bards of the Gods. After having performed worship, at Bodheswara, the pilgrims should proceed on to the lotus feet of Narayana. After having performed worship there, the pilgrims should then and there, leave his staff and his slippers after consecrating them with the required *Mantras,* for the successful completion of the pilgrimage.

After having seen Bodheswara Giri, the pilgrims should then proceed on to see the hermitage of Vasishtha, the place, which is famous as "vacsiddi", due to its glory. The Mahatamya records," All that, the bath, charity and the prayers in the vicinity of Vaygati Grama, undoubtedly becomes eternal. The state of super-natural qualities, which occurs due to coming out of Hamsdwara and also due to alighting from the Bodheswara Giri, the firmness of that for the enlightened results from going to Vaggatti—now called Wangat." After having performed the worship at the hermitage of Vasishtha, at the famous place Vaggathi, the pilgrims are enjoined to proceed on to the region of Kaliyasara to propitiate Ganesha. After that propitiating their own deities, the pilgrims should proceed on their respective homes, "according to the prescribed rites (method). The Mahatamya concludes with the passage which reads;" I have told you about Mukta Tirtha of Hara, the divine lake of Ullaramansa, which grants the way to salvation, destroys ignorance, is extremely perennial due to the proximity of the Goddess Bhagirathi and destroyer of all the sins in the *Kali Yuga*."

Amreshwara Mahatamya

The Amreshwara Mahatamya narrates the spiritual importance of the shrine of Swami Amarnath and recounts the legends of how the pilgrimage to Amarnath shrine began. The shrine of Amarnath is situated in the south of Kashmir at a distance of one hundred and seventy-six kilometers from Srinagar. The Amarnath shrine is a natural cave shrine; the cave is located amidst mountains and inside the enclosure of the cave, and an ice-*Lingam* is formed of the drops of water, which fall from its roof. Inside, the floor of the cave, is covered with ice. The ice-*Lingam* is formed in the right corner of the cave. Near the ice-*Lingam* are two other ice-*Lingams*; one believed to be that of Parvati and the other of Maha Ganesha. A stream of water flows out of the cave which is known as Amravati—the stream of nectar. According to the Amreshwara Mahatamya devotees who take a bath in the stream Amravati, attain *Moksha.*

The Amreshwara Mahatmya recounts that Parvati, the consort of Shiva, asked him why he wore a garland of skulls," you are God of Gods, can you not find a garland made of anything better than skulls." Shiva replied," The skulls are very precious to me, since they happen to be yours. You have taken births and have been my consort many a time. Every time you die, your skull is collected and added to this garland." Parvati was surprised and asked Shiva why did she die, while he lived in immortality. Shiva replied that because, he knew the secret of immortality. Thereupon, Parvati told Shiva to disclose the secret to her, so that she would acquire immortality. Shiva agreed and chose the cave temple of Amarnath to disclose the secret to Parvati, because it was far away in the mountains, that no other living being would hear the secrets of life and death, Shiva revealed to Parvati.

On the appointed day, Shiva set out for the Amarnath cave. Since he could not take Nandi the bull he rode with him, he left him at Ballagam or Pahalgam. Proceeding ahead he left the snake Sheshnag at the place which came to be called Sheshnag. He left Ganpati at Mahagunas. Further ahead he left Ganga which flowed from his locks at Panchtatarni. When he reached the holy cave, he made sure that no other living being heard him disclose the secret of immortality to Parvati; he played his drum, the *Damru*. The vibrations of the *Damru* were expected to make sure that no one remained around to hear the secrets of immortality. During the discourse, Parvati fell asleep. But two pigeons that were still in their eggs came out of the eggs, due to

vibrations of Damru, heard the secrets of immortality and became immortal.

The Mahatmya recount another legend about the Amarnath shrine. It says that Mahakala, the lord of death, went to Indra and to other Devas to collect them, Indra as well as Devas were frightened. They approached Shiva to implore him to save them from Mahakala and death. Pleased with the hymns they sang in his praise, Shiva squeezed the crescent he wore in his hair. Nectar, the potion of immortality flowed out of the crescent, which Devas drank to evade death. Some of squeezed nectar fell on the floor of the cave, where Shiva sat, and froze into a *Linga*. It is worshipped as Amrehwara, the divine symbol of immortality. The water flowing out of the *Linga,* in the form of a stream came to be known as stream of Amrita—Amaravati.

Amreshwara Mahatamaya recounts that it was the Sage Bhrigu, who was the first to find the cave temple of Amarnath. The Mahatamya record that Shiva narrated the secret of immortality to Parvati, and himself got converted into the *Lingam* in the holy cave, on *Pooranmashi* of *Sawan,* the fifteenth day of the bright fortnight of the month of *Sawan.*

About the pilgrimage to the Amarnath shrine, Bringesh Samihita, of which Amreshwara Mahatamya is a part, notes that people approached Rishi Bringesh, with the prayer to show them the path to salvation. Rishi Bringesh advised them to go on a pilgrimage to the cave temple of Amarnath and pray to Shiva *Linga* there. To make sure that their long pilgrimage over the mountains was safe Rishi Bringesh prayed to Lord Shiva, who gave *Rishi*, a pair of holy maces. Rishi Bringesh gave the maces to devotees for their protection while on a pilgrimage to holy Amarnath cave temple. Thereafter, the pilgrimage to the Amarnath shrine is conducted under two *Mahants* in whose custody the holy mace remain, and carry them to Amarnath as the head of *Yatra*. The two maces are now called the *Chhari Maharaj.*

The Amreshwara Mahatamya gives an elaborate description of pilgrimage to Amarnath Shrine and its spiritual significance. The pilgrimage is a narrative of the shrines the pilgrims visit on the course of the pilgrimage to Amarnath shrine and the spiritual significance of the religious rituals and practices performed at these shrines. Some of the shrines which the pilgrims to Amarnath visit on their way are places of pilgrimage in their own right, like the Koti Tirtha of Baramulla, where from the pilgrimage commenced in ancient time, Chakreshwar temple in Srinagar, temple of Shiva Vijayshwara at Bijbehara, Amrita Tirtha or Chotta Amarnath shrine, Sthalvati present Thajvor, the shrine of Bhawan at Mattan and the shrine at Ganeshbal.

Before the advent of the Muslim rule, the pilgrimage to Amarnath commenced from the Koti Tirtha, a shrine of considerable importance in Varahmullah present Baramulla in west Kashmir. During the Hindu period of the history of Kashmir Varahmullah was an important centre of Hindu theology, mainly Vaishnava. Koti Tirtha lost its importance after the Muslim rulers destroyed the important temples, among which Adi Varha, the *tirtha* of Vishnu.

A detailed chronology of the Yatra is given as;

Koti-Tirtha (Baramulla), a holy shrine, was the assembling place and known as the presiding deity of all the shrines of Kashmir, all water from sacred springs and streams of the valley flows down in confluence here. This was the starting point of the pilgrimage to cave temple of Shivpor. There must have been a temple here, but there is no trace of it now.

Pandrenthan. The old Panthdreshti about 1.5 miles from Shurahyar, there is a temple in the middle of the spring built by Meru the Prime Minister of King Paratha 921-31 AD **Padampor**. It is 5.5 miles from Pandrethan. It was here that saint-scholar Lal Ded lived. There is a spot here which is called Lalatrag.

Javati, modern Zewan is 7 miles from Srinagar. There is a spring here dedicated to Vasak Nag.

Meshitoud, means sweet water, the modern Petwan.

Avantiporika is known as Seda Khetor, the modern Avantipor. There are at these place old temples built by King Avantivarman (855-883 A.D).

Barsu. There is a stream flowing through the village called Rudara Ganga.

Jaubror. There must have been a temple here in olden times.

Mahawarishwarn, old Mahawaras.

Haridrak Ganapati or known as Hari Ganish.

Belihar or Belyar and was known as Lakhmi Khetor.

Wagahama. The place is known as Hastikaran.

Tsakrish.The modern Tsakodar, this is a plateau on the right bank of the Viltasta near Bijbihara. It is 28 miles from Srinagar.

Dewakar Tirth, modern Dewakivar.

Hari Tsander. It is the southern ghat of the Bijbihara stone temple. It contains a huge stone lingam.

Sthalwat. The modern Thajwor. It is 2.75 Miles from Bijbehara and here water drips from the southern side of the plateau through maiden-hair on the Shiv-lingam.

Suryi-Gohawati. The modern Sriguphvara. It is 4.75 miles from Thajwor.

Lambodari. Or modern Lidder, a stream in which the pilgrims have to bathe. The source of the Lidder is the Kolahoi glacier. A stream joins it at Lidderwat which is the corrupt form of Lambodar wat-a rock dedicated to Ganesh who is also named Lambodar and it is from here that the river was named Lambodari. This must have been a place of pilgrimage in the olden times. An affluent from Tarsar enters the river at this place. On one occasion Indra sought permission to visit Shiva. Ganesh did not allow him. So there followed a quarrel, Ganesh became furious and thirsty. He drank the river which became dry. Shiva while playing at his tabor poked the stomach of Ganesh with it and out flowed the stream again, hence Lambodari.

Sirhom. Here is a spring called Surya Ganga where worship takes place.

Bodrus. The place is sacred to Ganpati whose worship removes all obstacles.

Tsatrus Bodrus. The place is now called Hayi.

Shirshi Ashram. The Woter Nag Ganga flows by this Spot. It is 2 miles from Sriguphvara.

Sallar. Here the piligrims bathe in the stream. The place is 3.5 miles from Tsatrus Bodrus.

Bala Khelyan. Known as Vishna Khetor, the modern Bala Khellan.

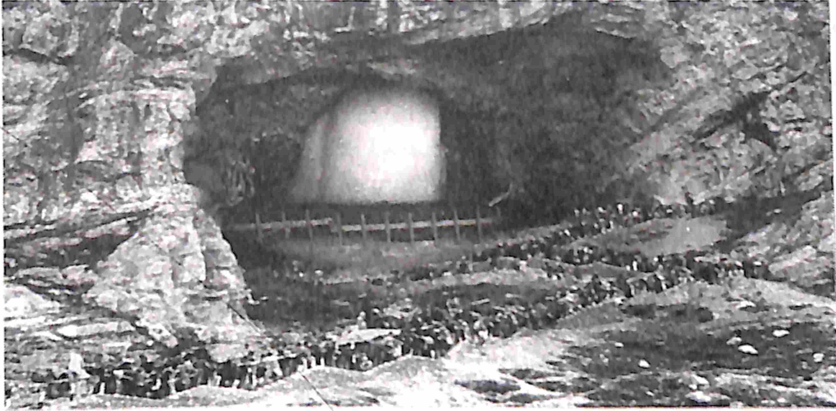
Ganesh Bal. 10.5 miles from Sallar. Here Lord Ganesh is worshipped. It is on the right bank of the Lidder below Pahalgam.

Mamalishwar (Shiva Lingam).On the right bank of the Lidder is a spring and an old temple containing a Shiva Lingam at this place which is about a mile from Pahalgam. It is said that when Shiva removed His seat from Thojwara to Mamalishwar, Ganesh who was his door-keeper did not allow Devas to visit Him. Hence the name of the village Mamal - don't go.

Bragapati Khetra. It is a spring in Pahalgam. It is said that Vishnu was pleased with the worship of Brago whom He embraced. Brago perspired, which gave rise to a spring. This spring is behind the village.

Nila Ganga. It is about 3 miles from Pahalgam. Close by the foot of Pisu Hill was the *tirth* of Sthanishwar where pilgrims had to bathe. One day Shiva kissed the eyes of Parvati to which antimony had been applied. He washed her eyes in water which turned dark-blue, hence Nila Ganga. There was a great fight between the Devas and the Daityas. The Devas did not allow the Daityas to see Shiva. The Daityas were defeated and ground down to tiny bits. Hence Pisu Hill. Sheshiram Nag. A certain Daitya's body was entirely made of wind. He became very powerful. He troubled the Devas every way. They all entreated Shiva

to rid them of the monster. Shiva told them that he was his disciple, and that they should approach Vishnu, which they did. Vishnu sent his Wahan, Sheshi Nag who sucked all the wind from the Daitya's body and the Daitya was killed. Pilgrims bathe in the lake.



Natural ICE-Lingam

Vaovajen. Some of the Daityas still concealed themselves in the lakes around the place. These lakes, were dried and the Daityas were killed. Hence Hoka Sar (dried lake). The Deva's were told to build small houses of stones as a shelter against the wind. Hence pilgrims also make toy sheds of stones.

Pantsatarni. This is believed to represent plaited hair *(jata)* of Shiva from which the Ganga flows. It is said that Shiva told one of his Rudhra gans to beat the drum every evening. He forgot to do so one evening. Thereupon he was cursed and turned into a mountain which is now known as Bairau Bal.

Garbagar. On the other side of the Bairau BAL is Garbagar popularly known as Garba Yatra. Nandi complained to Shiva that he could not stop the rush of Devas coming to visit him. He ordered Nandi to get a huge rock and make a hole through it, so that everyone desirous of visiting him would have to pass through that hole while Nandi would be standing near the hole.

Amaravati. All living beings besought Shiva to disclose a method which would render them immortal. Thereupon Shiva rinsed His plaited hair (*jata*) and out-flowed the Amaravati—the stream of immortality. Some of the drops fell here and there giving birth to some of the gods, while himself he turned into Sudha ling (immortal emblem) in a corner

of the cave temple. Every one being satisfied praised Shiva.

Sangam. The confluence of the Amaravati with the Pantsatarni is the place where a pilgrim has to perform *Shrada* (a ceremony for the dead).

On return journey the pilgrim washes himself in the nine springs of Naudal (nine leaves), which is 22 miles from Pahalgam via Bugmor pass and revisit Mamalishwar.

Patal Ganga. (Near Nishat Bagh, Srinagar)This is the last place where a pilgrim has to bathe.

Mahima—Grace of Amareshwara

Yah prashavanyaam Maha Devi prapashyeedgiri madhyamam, Lingam Amaranaadha rupasa gacchhecchiva sannidhou!

(Maha Devi! Those who have *darshan* of Amarnath Linga in Shravana Nakshatra would be rewarded with Shiva Loka nivasa!)

Sparshanaat Deva Devasya Lingasya Jagadeshwari, Paapa panchaka nirmukto yaati Shaiva param padam/

(Jagadeshwari! Those who have the great fortune of Maha Deva Linga *sparsha* would redeem themselves of sins in entirety and attain Parama pada).

Vaaranaasyaa dasha gunam Prayaagaaccha shata smritam, Sahasra gunitam Devi Naimishaan kuru, Punya phaladam proktam mayaatava Priyecchayaa/

(Devi! This Amarnath Linga grants the fruits of worship at the Varanasi Linga by ten times, Prayaga's puja by hundred times, Naimisha by thousand times.)

Ghrita guggula samyuktaam dhupamati Sundari, Sarva paapa vinirmukto yaati Maheshwara padam/

(Sundari! Persons duly performing 'Arati' with ghee to the Amareshwara Linga shall reach Maheshwara –pada.)

Pradakshinaardha yo Devi yo dadhaan Maheshwari, Pade pade cha medhaanaam sahasram prapnumaan narah/

(Devi, those who perform half circumambulation to Amara Linga, shall reap the reward of Ashwamedha Yagna for each step!)

Tatovaruhecchalaatushrayeh sangamamuttamam, Shraaddam kritwaa vidhaanena tarpaye Pitru Devataah/

(On return from the Mountains, the Devotees are advised to return back to the flows of the Sangam and duly perform *Pitru Shradha* and

execute *tarpanas* to *Pitru Devatas* and Devas.)

Veda parayanam Punyam praapnotyeva na samshayah, Yatraamevam vidham kritwaa punyam Amara nayakam/

(Yatris to Amaranaath are assured of Veda paarayana Punya, but countless other benefits too)

Muktimeva samaapnoti vina chendriya nigrahaih,Ihaloke sukhi bhutwa Ante saayujya maapnuyat/

(The Yatris would enjoy the rest of their lives with contenment and at the termination of life attain Sayujya)

Iti guhyam maahakhyaam phalamamaraalayam, Yacchrutwaamuchyate Janturmahapaataka kotibhih/Ityesha patalo guhyo Maha paapa pranaashakah,Shrutascha Pathitaschaapi Hayamedhaadhiyagadah/

(Maha Bhairava assured Devi Parvati:The above narration is a Rahasya Vrittaanta or of Confidential nature that uproots all kinds of Paatakas committed by human beings who have successfully accomplished the pilgrimage to Amara nath. Those who read or listen to this Account willl have secured Ashwamedhaadi Yajna Phala!)

[This is the Sacred Description of Shri Bhairava Bhairavi Samvaada on Shri Amaranath Yatra Phala from Bhringi Samhita of Skanda Purana]

Chapter V

VEDIC TRADITION

The religious culture of the Hindus in Kashmir is a part of the Sanatan Dharma, the Hindu religion. It has grown over the centuries from its beginnings in the proto-Aryan beginnings of Vedic era. Aryan migration is a myth, which has now lost its mythical value. The Vedic culture spread across the north of the Indian sub-continent and perhaps went beyond the Vindhyas into south of India. "The Vedic civilization of the legendry river Saraswati flourished in the close vicinity of Kashmir. There is little doubt left now about the historicity of the Saraswat people. Geological evidence has come to surface which establishes beyond doubt that the river Saraswati flowed down from the Himalayas in a north-westerly course, to Rann of Kutch. Archaeological excavation along the course of the ancient river has revealed sterling facts about the civilization linkages between the Harappan and the Saraswat people. David Frawley, a leading US Indologist has reported, that a Committee of geologists, historians, geographers and other experts appointed by Government of India, under the chairmanship of Dr. V.S.Watankar, conducted a survey of 150 archaeological sites, over a stretch of 3500 kilometers along the course of the river Saraswati. They used latest techniques such as Multi-Spectral Scanner (MSS) and land sat imagery. The Committee concluded that the river Saraswati dried up gradually between 1800 BC and 800 BC due to tectonic movements which caused change in the course of river Satluj. The Committee discredited the theory of Aryan invasion of India and rejected the sociological divide between the pre-Aryan India and the Vedic India of the Aryan origin. It refused to recognize that the Harappan and Mohenjo-Daro cultures represent the pre-Aryan, Indus Valley Civilization. The Committee concluded that the discovery of the

dried channel of the river Saraswati, east of river Indus and the location of more than 260 archaeological sites which showed civilizational similarities to Harappan and Mohenjo-Daro cultures provided evidence of the historical continuity of the Sind Valley Civilization and the early Vedic civilization of India."

The sub-stratum of the Hindu religious beliefs is the tradition of the Vedas. The belief system of the Kashmiri Hindus is Vedic; their ritual culture is Vedic—exactly as that of the Atharva-Veda and the Vedic Kalpa-Sutra. All Grah-Sutras are a Vedic expression and the ritual culture of the Kashmiri Hindus is a Vedic expression. There is nothing in the Hindu religious culture of Kashmir, which the British historians and their European contemporaries have described as pre-Vedic or post-Vedic or non-Vedic. Being a part of the Vedic civilization with its proto-Aryan roots, the religious culture of the Hindus of Kashmir does not have any pre-Vedic history. Burzahom was on the fringes of the Saraswati culture and perhaps the belief-system of the Hindus of Kashmir grew as a part of the belief system of the Saraswat Hindus. Burzahom people lived in pits as did the people of Gofhakral close-by. "Excavations carried on by the Archeological Survey of India in 2003-2006, at Bhirrana, a Harappan site in Fatehabad, Haryana, have led to the discovery of under-ground dwelling pits, house-complex on streets, a fortification wall, bichrome pottery, terracotta cups, arrow-heads, fish boots and bangles all in copper, incised copper Celts, terracotta toy carts and animal figurines and beads of semi-precious stones." Both the people of Burzahom and Bhirrana in Haryana lived in dwelling pits and the sites have a closer cultural affinity."There is evidence to establish that the beginning of the Nilmat era of the history of Kashmir followed the introduction of metal tools into Kashmir from its Harappan surroundings. Nilmat era can be identified as the period through which the sub-structure of the Hindu religious culture of Kashmir evolved and the proto-Aryan ritual structures of Burzahom people and the Vedic ritual structures, embodied in the Vedic Kalpa Sutras and the Grah Sutras, were integrated into the *Karmkanda,*latter codified for the Hindus of Kashmir by Muni Laugakhsha."

The Vedic era is characterized by belief in Devas, the Gods. The Samhita and the Brahmana sections of the Rig-Veda and Yujur Veda are central to the way of the worship which the Hindus of Kashmir continue to follow even today. The worship of the Devas, though modified by time and geography, the forms of worship survive in their essentials. "These rituals have survived to this date though in modified

form and constitute *Karmkanda*—the path of rituals. The Mantras are broadly liturgical in character. They are mainly religious songs in praise of one or more deities and were intended generally to be sung at the time of offering worship to them." The broad belief system's which is inherent in the Hindu religious culture of Kashmir is perfectly Vedic in content. They are:

(a) The whole universal existence is the expression of the divine will, which is personified by the Devas or Gods,
(b) This universal existence is inherently governed by a supernatural order, which the Devas impart to it.
(c) A moral code which describes the boundary between good and evil is laid down by Devas,
(d) The human beings worship Devas to propitiate them to protect them from evil by offering worshipping to them, in the forms of *yajna*, giving them *Ahuti,*sacrifice- presentation in forms of rituals, which are known as *yajna.*
(e) the Devas are propitiated by *Ahuti* and *yajna.*
(f) the Devas are graded in a hierarchy –an order which places them in Higher and junior positions.
(g) the Devas inhabit three abodes, which the Hindus of Kashmir call *Lokas;*
    (i) Devas live in *Dyava Loka* or the heaven;
    (ii) *Prithvi Loka* or the world;
    (iii) The *Antekrisha*, the space in general.

Like the Aryans, the Hindus of Kashmir believe that there are thirty-three Devas, which include Indra, Prajapati, Rudra, Vasus and Aditiya who are a group of deities of Devas. An important classification of forces is made by the Vedas, which Hindu religious culture recognizes as the evil forces and the more commonly known among them are, Asures, Rakshakas and Pisachas.

The human-beings are the creation of a divine act. Interestingly, the Kashmiri Hindus believe that the human-being is a divine identity, the *Atman,* which is bound to the bondage by being inside his body. "The true nature of man is the same as that of Brahman, the supreme god. This *jiva,* the *Atman* in bondage, has five *Koshas* or sheaths, three bodies. It performs actions motivated by *Icha*-desire, experiences pain due to *Karma* and undergoes transmigration until *Moksha*—libration. When this *jiva* is shorn of its limiting *Upadis*— adjuncts like body and mind, it is identical with Brahman, since its essential nature also is truth, consciousness and bliss—-*Sat-Chit-Ananda.*"

The Vedas mention three main Devas, who top the hierarchy of Devas. The first and the foremost is Prajapati. Prajapati is the creator of this universe and the Vedas note that he existed before the Vedas were revealed. He is personified with the reality that existed before the universal existence came into being. An interesting aspect of his being is that he resides in golden embryo—the *Hiranyagarba,* in the ball of fire—*Brahmanda.*

The second major Deva is Indra, the conqueror, who is able to subordinate everything to him. He lives in heaven or *Dyava Loka*. The third major Deva is Rudra, and is characterized by his dreadfulness.

The Deva in the second hierarchy is Agni. He is considered deputy of Indra. He is the medium or the agent. The humans send their oblations in sacrifice known as *yagna* and called by Kashmiri Hindus *Yagya.* Agni is present in all the three Lokas: the *Dyava Loka, Prithvi Loka* as well as *Anteriksh.*

Agni has many attributes of which the following are common among Kashmiri Hindus;

(i) Graha Pati; the lord of *Yagna* and *Homa,*
(ii) Havya Vahana; commonly called *Havan* among Kashmiri Pandits— The medium of sending oblations to Devas,
(iii) Kavya Vahana; the medium through which oblations are sent to Pitras—the deceased ancestors.

Agni's spouse is Svaha, the call that is given at the time of oblations offered to Agni, is always accompanied with the *Mantra: Bhu- Svaha.*

Besides of Devas, the Vedas mention Devis or Goddesses as well. The Goddesses too are graded into a hierarchy of more powerful of them and less powerful of them. The main Devis are Usha, who denotes light and drives away darkness; Prithivi, the earth, who is the cause of creation, the mother—who sustains and supports; Aditi, the mother of the God Indra; Saraswati, the river goddess, on the banks of which Rig Veda was revealed to Rishis; Vakh, the goddess of speech; Nirrti, the goddess of death or extinction; and Ratri, the goddess of night.

Among the lesser Devis are goddesses, which are associated with prosperity and include Puramdhi, Parendi, Raka, Dishana and Kuhi. Below them are the Devis; Sinivali, the goddess of fertility; Ida, minor Saraswati; Surya, the daughter of Sun God.; Danu, who represents the waters of heaven; Saranyu, the mother of twins Yama and Yami, who are the progenitors of the human race; Sarama, the messenger of Indra; Indrani, wife of Indra; Rudrani, wife of Rudra; Aranyani, the goddess of forests; and Varunani, wife of Varuna. .

Among the lesser Vedic Devas which the Hindus of Kashmir worship is, Yama the first human being who faced death found out the way to Pitra-Loka—the world of the dead ancestors. He is also known as *Dharam Raja*, who awards punishments for good and bad to the souls of the dead brought to him. Besides Yama, the other Deva who is reverentially worshipped by the Hindus of Kashmir is Brahaspati, the lord of prayers or the lord of worship. He is close to Agni. He is father of the gods and all prayers emanate from him. He is the first priest-guru of the Devas and therefore, called *Purohita.*

The Vedas mention of a collection of all the Devas as Vishve-Devas, commonly called in Kashmiri Vasli Deva. The Hindus of Kashmir worship them reverently and offerings are made to them with reverence. The Vasli Devas in Vedic lore, represent the protections of the moral law or the *Rta.*

The Vedas mention the presence of evil forces in the world. The Kashmiri Hindus recognize them as the Vedas describe; "*Asuras, Rakshasas, Pishachas, Yatu*, Serpents are evil forces, who are depicted as multi-headed animals or mutilated plants. They always go in groups and roam in darkness. *Asuras*, who are cousins of Devas, are always engaged in fighting against them and are generally losers but sometimes when they succeed, Indra intervenes to restore status the of Devas. Rakshasas are enemies of humans and fight against them. Pishachas fight against *manas*—dead ancestors."

The most striking feature of the Kashmiri Hindu religious culture is the continuity of its Vedic belief systems which are described below:

(a) the worship of Devas and offering of sacrifice to them in *Yagnas* in order to earn their favour.

(b) the Vedas impose three obligations on the human beings;
  (i) Deva-rin, obligation to propitiate Devas;
  (ii) Rishi-rin, the obligation to their Rishis and
  (iii) Pitra-rin, and offer oblations to their ancestors.

(c) The Vedas lay down an obligation for all human beings to follow a moral code of conduct, which under lines: virtuousness, truthfulness, observance of self-restrain, kindness for their fellow beings; share his wealth with his fellow-beings.

(d) the Vedas impose upon all human-beings the obligation to be pious."The punishment for sin and vice is eternal damnation in hell, a place of eternal darkness."

(e) the Vedas enjoin belief in transmigration of soul and the immortality of the soul.

The most interesting part of the Vedic theology is that it did not accept life a part of the nature, as a passing phase of phenomena that the universal existence represented. Since the Vedas believed that the creation of the universal existence was not an accident but a conscious effort of the Parmatman, they believed that human life was not an accident but a conscious creative act of the Parmatman. Interestingly, the Vedic people sought light in darkness, freedom from pain and unhappiness. They sought access to knowledge to know, what the existence was. Above all they sought immortality. They revolted against death and repelled it unreal. These principles formed the basis of Vedic philosophy.

The Vedic Scriptures

The Vedic scriptures are the most ancient scriptures of the Hindu religion, which are believed to be heard, being pronounced throughout the entire universe. Evidently, they were learnt verbatim and then of course they assumed the written form. Being heard they are called Shruties.

The Vedas are four in number. The earliest and the primordial is the Rig Veda; largely a compendium of praise of the creator, the Parmatman. The second in the number of Vedas is the Yajur Veda, which is a collection of hymns of worship of the Vedic gods. The Sama Veda is the third Veda and forms a collection of the hymns of divine melody. Atharva Veda is fourth Veda and narrates the Mantras, hymns and forms of worship to ward off calamities and the entire phenomenon which bring trouble and destruction to man. Each of Veda has four parts:

(a) Samhita which narrates the Vedic verses of worship in specific rituals.

(b) Brahmana which also narrates the Vedic verses describing the rituals and the forms of worship. Samhitas and Brahmanas are called Vedic Karm Kanda—which form the Vedic ritual structure.

(c) Aranyaka which narrate Vedic verses, providing theoretical explanation of the various phenomenon related to the inter-relation of;

  (i) Parmatman—the God.

  (ii) Prakrati, the nature with its inexorable and unchanging laws and process,

  (iii) the Pursha or man.

(d) Upanishads; which narrate the Vedic verses, and provide the guidelines of relations between,

(i) the Parmatman,(ii) the Prakrati or nature (iii) and the man.

Upanishads form the basic principles of the Hindu theory of action and as a whole represent the Janana Kanda or the Hindu philosophy and knowledge. Upanishads, represent the philosophical explanations which appear to have evolved by the Vedic people at a very mature and advanced staged of their intellectual development. The Vedic people, it must be noted, must have been in quest of knowledge of the manifestation of this world, the process in which it continued and probably the decay and death they experienced as one of its parts. Sources of knowledge of the Hindu religion are traced to the Upanishads that is why they are called the Vedanta. "To judge from the way in which these texts have grown, they contain not the thought of a single teacher, but of a series of teachers and this represent a growth in which new ideas have mingled with the old." (Swami Ranganathanga, 'Science and Religion' published by Advaita Ashram, Kolkata, 2001).

It is believed that there are, or were, 108 Upanishads but only 12 Upanishads are considered to be original. The Upanishads are in the form of verses and have been commented upon by many saints, seers and the learned Rishis. The Upanishads are

(1) Isa Upanishad.
(2) Kena Upanishad.
(3) Katha Upanishad.
(4) Prasna Upanishad.
(5) Mundaka Upanishad.
(6) Mandukya Upanishad.
(7) Taittiriya Upanishad.
(8) Aitareya Upanishad
(9) Kaushitaki Upanishad.
(10) Chandogya Upanishad.
(11) Brhadaranyaka Upanishad.
(12) Svetasvatara Upanishad.

The whole expanse of the evolution of the Vedic tradition spread across a time scale, which appears, by its dimensions to be incredible and across a geographical expanse which extended to the civilizational frontiers of India.

Perhaps the whole tradition precipitated into uniform sets of ideals, ideas and practices, which were bound together by linkages of history as well as geography. It is difficult to differentiate between the Vedic

and post-Vedic era of the evolution of the Vedic civilization, which represents a continuity. However, some time, after the Vedic civilization, the Vedic traditions turned from early practices of worship and rituals to a more sophisticated problem of existence which faced them. This is the time when the Vedic people turned to exploration and contemplation of the primary causes of the manifestation of the world, and questions regarding life, birth, and death and whole scheme of how it has sustained. No less important is the fact that the Vedic scriptures have regulated and still regulate the social culture, normative standards, which govern the Hindu civilization.

The Upanishads represent the philosophy of the Vedas. Sages and Rishis made commentaries on Upanishads and these commentaries, aimed to clarify the Upanishadic concepts, came to be called the *Bhasya*. The Upanishads and the *Bhasyas* constitute the philosophy of Hinduism. "The Upanishads are the basic literature from which Vedic thoughts have emerged, but these Upanishads present heterogeneous views, which are of mystic nature, concerned more about the rituals. Various sages dived deep into these Upanishads and picked up a few hymns from each of these sources of knowledge. These hymns called *Sutras* were meant for teaching to their students in their *Ashrams*. The thoughts in these *Sutras* were written in aphorisms for putting to memory."

Later commentaries used the *Sutras* for further commentaries on the *Basyas*. Since the language was mystic and in aphorism, various interpretations were attempted, which led to the growth of several schools of thought. Only six of these schools have been recognized. These schools are;

1. Nyaya,
2. Vaiseshika,
3. Samkhya,
4. Yoga,
5. Vedanta,
6. Mimamsa.

The meta-physical aspects of the philosophy are expounded in three schools:

1. Nyaya,
2. Samkhya,
3. Vedanta.

The other three schools generally describe the practice and methodologies of these three schools. Therefore, two of these schools are

paired in a way, which represents the postulates as well as practices in the following manner:

1. Nyaya—Vaiseshika;
2. Samkhya—Yoga;
3. Vedanta—Mimamsa;

As the Rig Veda rightly points out that the truth is one but is called by various names, the systems of three schools of postulates and practices present an intermingling of ideas and practices. "These systems do not represent a well defined division of thoughts. They show frequent borrowings of ideas from each other. The centrality of expressions in these systems is expressed in the Rig Veda."

Nyaya—Vaiseshika

Nyaya-Vaiseshika system is the most important of the Vedic tradition as it pertains to argument and analysis of the universal existence, man and the nature around him. Nyaya-Vaiseshika basically seeks to identify whatever diversity underlines the universal existence In fact the basis of the Nyaya-Vaiseshika system is based upon;

(a) Vaiseshika Sutra of Kanada,
(b) Nyaya Sutra of Gautama,
(c) commentaries and *Bhasya* written upon these two Sutras.

The whole system is an explanation or a sum of explanations on the universal existence, which it believes constitutes nine substances. "An important postulate of Nyaya Darshan states, that "all knowledge by its very nature points to an object beyond it and independent of it." These objects, it is stated, are independent not only of knowledge, but also of one another, whence this doctrine is called 'pluralistic realism."

The nine substances through which the system describes the universal existence are:

1. Earth;
2. Water;
3. Fire;
4. Air;
5. Ether-Akasha;
6. Time;
7. Space;
8. Self-Atman;
9. Mind-Manas.

Coming closer to elementary principles of philosophy, the Nyaya system, explains that earth, water, fire and air are made of particles

called atoms. Akasha, is an element and along with earth, water, fire and air forms the elements. Time and space are also conceptualized as objective realities like Akasha. Self is regarded as omnipresent and eternal and is conscious. Each self has its mind and mind is characterized as atomic and eternal. In every self mind is the instrument of knowing or seeking knowledge. The nine elements form the framework of the universal manifestation.

The Vaishshika part of the Nyaya-Vaishshika describes seven categories of attributes of the existence:

1. Guna—nature tendency;
2. Karma—action;
3. Samanya;
4. Vishesha—specific
5. Samavaya;
6. Abhava—absence;
7. The elements of Nyaya.

According to Nyaya, knowledge is objective and subjective as well.

Samkhya—Yoga System

Samkhya Darshan was propounded by Sage Kapila. The Samkhya Darshan accepts the independence of the *Purusha* the God and *Prakrati* called the self. *Prakrati* is compared with perennial energy, the ultimate primordial matter which is ever active, but without consciousness. Purusha is the cosmic spirit which is pure consciousness —the Divine Spirit. The universal existence is created by the interplay of these two cosmic factors, the consciousness and primordial matter.

Yoga is the philosophy of Patanjali, which actually propounds a system of mental and physical training of the body and spiritual discipline. Four main divisions of Yoga have been identified. Yoga is classified in four forms;

(a) Karma Yoga—Yoga of action
(b) Jnana Yoga—Yoga of knowledge
(c) Bhakti Yoga—Yoga of devotion
(d) Raj Yoga—Yoga of meditation.

Vedanta—Mimamsa System

Vedanta Darshan deals with the philosophic postulates while Mimamsa describes the performances of rituals to realize the eternal reality, which

Vedanta believes, is inherent in the whole existence. Vedanta is mainly based upon the Vedanta Sutra or Sharika Sutra, which are contribution of Badrayana Vysa. Generally it is accepted that the Vedanta has its source in;

(i) The Upanishads,
(ii) The Brahmans,
(iii) Bhagwad Gita.

The Vedanta philosophy has three schools;

(a) Advaita Vedanta;
(b) Dvaita Vedanta;
(c) Vishista Vedanta;

Advaita Vedanta in simple terms signifies that there is only reality and the whole universal existence is an inseparable part of the one reality. According to Vedanta school the one reality is Brahman—the Supreme God and the manifestation of the universal existence is an inherent part of the Brahman. "Brahman is transcendent—*Para Brahman*. He is beyond the reach of human mind, which is limited. He is the first and ultimate cause of manifestation. He is *Sarvajna*—omniscient, *Sarvashakti*—omnipotent and *Sarvavypak*—omnipresent. He is *Srshta*—sole creator, *Sthita*—sustainer and *Pralaya*—cause of dissolution. The manifestation of this universal existence is an inseparable part of Brahman, an expression of eternal energy in him, which appears to be outside him because of the illusion of Maya."

The three aspects of the essences of the Brahman are:

1. Sat—eternal reality;
2. Chit –pure consciousness;
3. Anand—pure bliss.

It should be noted that Sat, Chit and Anand are not the attributes of Brahman of the Vedanta, but they are essence of reality, that is Brahman. His attributes are the only way the human mind can conceptualize him. As the essence of Brahman, Sat is the eternal reality which is not subject to limitations of space, time, cause or effect, rest or movement. Sat can be described in three ways, which characterize its three types;

(a) Pratibhasika Satya; which is the apparent truth or the perception of the truth,
(b) Vayabarika Satya; which is the truth established of experience of day to day life and can be placed at a level which is higher than the Pratibhasika truth and perhaps leads to or lasts as long as the man gets true knowledge or Atama Janana.

(c) Parmarthika Satya; which is the real truth, the knowledge of the Brahman or Atma or Chit, the only reality which exists. The reality does not have any form, it does not have any attributes and it does not have Being, because of which it can be described in terms of Neti-Neti—not this as well as not this and inabsolute terms and finally termed as not this.

Chit is consciousness which Vedanta describes in several state's such as;

(a) Wakefulness; which gives an empirical describes of the existence.

(b) Dream; in which all the organs of senses and phenomena related to them and which a body is related in wakefulness are dormant and a combination of the mind and what it perceives in wakefulness are reviewed.

(c) Sushupati; consciousness which is neither wakefulness nor dream, in which mind as well as the body organs of the body are in a state of meditation, a state in which neither empirical activity takes place, nor is mind involved in any of its regular activity. In this state a man can attain temporary union with God.

(d) Turya; Turya is the supreme sense of consciousness.

(e) Anand; is the essence of the Brahman—actually the intelligence, beyond the human comprehension.

According to Vedanta the universal existence or the manifestation the Brahman assumes is illusory or what the Vedanta call Maya, it does not need an explanation. An illusory object has no explanation. Several sages beginning from Guadapa and mainly Shankaracharya have attempted to present explanation of the manifestations of the Brahman which Shankaracharya has called Shruties or revealed texts. "Since manifestation is only an illusion so there is no need to explain manifestation process and yet Shankaracharya did present manifestation through a series of steps which he described as respecting Shruties as they have done so. He characterizes such description as giving accidental or casual characteristics of Brahman to help humans to understand Him better, even as the branch of a tree helps us to locate the crescent moon in sky."

The manifestation of Maya is the one reality. Brahman, is an unexplainable phenomenon as heat is in fire and is inseparable from it. Maya is the whole structure of the illusionary existence with its definitions, forms, and identities which is caused by the erroneous

recognition of the truth—a false knowledge or Mithya-gyana of the real truth. The manifestation of the universal existence is no real. It is only apparent. Brahman alone is real; this world is only an illusory appearance.

Dvaita Vedanta Tradition

Dvaita Vedanta or dualism in Vedanta is a later addition to the Vedantic philosophy made by Madav Acharya in the early thirteenth century and it had little effect on the evolution of the Vedic tradition in Kashmir. "It states that the world and individuals are two independent identies, who are controlled by Brahman. Individuals get entangled in world because of their ignorance about the true reality of Brahman. Through devotion to god and through his mercy, individuals can achieve liberation and live in heaven as individual souls in the presence of Lord."

Vashisht Advaita

The school of Vashist Advaita is also known as qualified dualism. It was advocated by Ramanuj Acharya in twelfth century. "It says that Brahman only exists. The whole universal existence is his body in which men the Jivas exist as innumerable little cells. The soul of every individual is inseparable from the Brahman. The liberation of the human being lies in the realization that he is an inseparable part of the Brahman. Complete self-surrender is the means for attainment of liberation. In the librated state, Jiva is ever aware that he is a limb of god and has no separate identity."

Apart from how far Advaita Mimamsa influenced the evolution of religious culture in Kashmir, it is probably necessary to analyze, more elaborately the Mimamsa part of the Advaita and examine the theoretical postulates of how the Brahman—the relation between ultimate reality and its manifestation, for the fact remains that Advaita accepted manifestation of the whole universal existence of the ultimate reality of Brahman. Advaita could go to extent of qualifying the Brahman as the Sat—the truth, Chit—the pure consciousness and Anand—the being of Brahman, which is beyond the consciousness or mind of man and a part of the manifestation of the Brahman is an illusion.

To what an extent the work of Gandapa and Shankaracharya influenced the evolution of Vedantic tradition in Kashmir is still unexplainable. It can of course, with less certainty be concluded, that Vedic

principles assimilated in Kashmir philosophy, were more from orthodox in Vedanta. To understand and give the reader, some form of a direction to understand and carry on further research on this aspect of the evolution of the religious culture of Kashmir, it is necessary to make a study of the manifestation process the Vedanta accepted. It appears that that the manifestation process accepted by the Vedanta had a wider impact on the growth of religious culture in Kashmir. Perhaps, the conclusion can be drawn that according to orthodox Vedanta the expression of the one reality is enough to understand the universal existence. It is an illusion and cannot be or does not need to be defined. "Since manifestation is only an illusion, so there is no need to explain manifestation process." It is here, perhaps, where the end of Vedanta in Kashmir reached. The process of manifestation was later explained in series of steps by Shankaracharya which he described as respecting Shruties or revealed texts.What was the extent of the influence the Pre-Shankaracharya commentators on traditional Vedanta in Kashmir had, and the great sage Shankar acharya had, after them, is still unexplained. A study of Kashmir Shaiva philosophy tends to prove that the monistic doctrines of Kashmir Shaivaism grew from the original Vedantic tradition, which was not in any way influenced by Shankar acharya. Shiavite monism travels back to the Vedic origins, which did conceive the universal existence as a part of the Parmatman. But that can only be established by in-depth research in the evolution of the religious era of the Nilmat age.

Theory of Action

An integral part of the Vedic tradition is that it propounded a theory of action which, though inward looking like the basic Vedic tenets appears to have some social projection. The Vedic tradition enumerated a number of goals for a human being to achieve. The four-fold enumeration of goals is;

1. Dharma; following the right path of life.
2. Artha; work for a living.
3. Kama; get what a man desires;
4. Moksha; perform the prescribed disciplinary practice to achieve moksha—liberation.

Dharma is explained in enumeratory detail laying down norms of behavior both individual and social. It provides basic guidelines for an

accepted conduct of an individual within himself, his family, his community, his nation. Dharma also enjoins all people to act in every situation on the basis of righteousness. All men are enjoined to practice forgiveness for other's faults, *Khema,* to exercise *Dharma* which means control over the faculties of his mind. Dharma also enjoins upon every individual to follow *Asteyam*—a commitment to non-stealing and greed. Dharma lays down principles not only for physical cleanliness but cleanliness of mind and exercise control over *Kama* or lust; *Loba* or greed; *Moha* or attachment; *Ahankara* or arrogance and *Irsha* or jealousy. Dharma includes the commitment of every individual to *Indriya Nigraha* or his senses, which apparently please him. Dharma enjoins upon every individual to inculcate in his mind, wisdom; *Vidhya* or knowledge; *Satyam* or truthfulness; *Akroda* or control over anger. The activity of *Artha* means to act or perform, work to earn a living for himself, his family and to meet his social obligations. *Kama* is exposited by—lust, and passion, which are canalized to form families for procreation and the satisfaction of the natural instinct.

The most important as well as the most interesting tenets of Dharma, is *Moksha* or liberation from birth and death. One has to have knowledge of the law of Karma and transmigration of soul to reach the highest goal of *Moksha.* Under the influence of *Maya*, *Jiva* is entangled into the endless cycle of cause and effect known as *Karma.* The desire for objects, which are not real or everlasting, leads to more greed for its achievement, resulting in more involvement in the cycle of life and death. The process of cycles of birth and rebirths is called Samsara, which has no beginning and no end.

Transmigration of Soul

In the Vedic tradition, the transmigration of the soul is bound with the theory of *Karma.* According to the Vedic tradition, the next body that a man's soul is given is according to the morality of action he has committed in his life. The assumption of life in another body after death, the Vedas enjoin continue till a soul enjoys *Moksha* and joins the *Parmatman* of whom he is a part. The Vedic tradition classified three types of Karmas;

1. Parabda Karma or Sanchita Karma: Prarabda Karma is the way of life a man will live according to his past actions in two aspects. The fixed aspect, which becomes the Karmic destiny, is first aspect. The second aspect is variable Karma which

remains hidden in a latent form in the *Samskaras* of a child.

2. The second type of Karma is Kriyaman Karma, which are accumulated on day to day basis in the life-cycle of man.
3. The third type of Karma is Agami Karma—the present action which will have future effect.

The Vedic tradition accepts, off course, with hidden contradictions, that the Karmic law provides a possibility of modifying, even extinguishing past Karma. An individual is always in a state of turning from bad to worse or from bad to good by his actions.

Vedic tradition has underlines ways of salvation from the cycle of life and death and attainment of *Moksha* by following disciplinary procedures.

1. Karma Yoga—the disciplinary system of action.
2. Bhakti Yoga—devotion to *Parmatman.*
3. Gyan Yoga—the discipline of mind, the acquisition of Gyan, knowledge about the true nature of the creation.

After the Puranic era, particularly after the rise of Buddhism, Kashmir became great centre of learning. Not enough research and investigation has been undertaken into the intellectual contribution of the Hindu scholars of Kashmir to various schools of philosophy, including Buddhism and Shaivism. No less was the contribution the Hindus of Kashmir made to the growth of the Bhakti yoga and the whole structure of Shakhta system, which separated from its Tantric rituals, represented the philosophical essentials of the Upanishads. The expression of the Bhakti Bhava, the praise of the *Parmatman* and the *Bhavani,* assumed staggering fineness and beauty in the expression of devotion to *Parmatman* or the Mother Goddess. At one time Kashmir became the centre of Bhakti Yoga and Gyan Yoga, which assumed various expressions, Bakhti Yoga like the concept of Hari-Hara and Shavite monistic philosophy.

Chapter **VI**

MOTHER GODDESS BHAVANI

For decades the British historians confined the conceptualization of the Mother Goddess to the deities of fertility and perhaps, the deities about which they had known from the study of Semitic cultures. The Hindu concept of the Mother Goddess, the *Bhavani,* with her other names can be best understood by the explanation of the father-mother duo—father being the cause of creation and the mother being the origin of creation. Hindu religious culture, including the Hindu religious culture of Kashmir, believes that the Mother-Goddess is the mother of the 'whole universal existence of which it is born and who sustains it.

Bhavani in the Hindu religious culture is not a deity who is entrusted by God Almighty the task that she is created for—such as the deity of fertility. The Mother Goddess herself is the sole creator of the universe, along with its deities. She gives birth to the creation that is manifested by the *Parmatman*, because the *Bhavani* is inherent in the *Parmatman*. The conceptualization of Mother-Goddess, in the Hindu culture begins with the Vedic conceptualization of the creation, which recognizes the unity of the *Parmatman* and his manifestation of the universal existence.

The basic feature of the Mother Goddess is universality in the Hindu religious culture —inspite of the variety of forms, she is described in. Cyril Veliath of Institute of Asian Cultures (Sopha University) writes; "All these various deities are looked upon as different manifestations of the One Great Mother Goddess, that mysterious entity who brought this world into being, who is seen in different forms in the various paintings and temple sculptures of India, and who loves and protects all living beings, as a mother would love and protect her own children.

She is 'Annapurna' the earth mother, bounteous and rich in food, which ceaselessly nourishes her children. She is 'Camunda,' the controller of old age, disease, and death, and she is 'Shakti,' or pure energy. Why is this mother goddess so popular in India? As stated earlier, scholars have offered different explanations. Some are of the opinion, that the reason why all goddesses and chiefly the Mother Goddess is so popular in India, is because of the great reverence that people have for the land, and for the nation of India as a whole. Since Indians by and large are an agricultural community, from ancient times the land was considered very important by the people of its villages.

The most ancient religious scripture of India is the Rig Veda, and Rig Veda contains several hymns to 'Prithvi,' the earth goddess. Here the earth is praised for its abundant fruitful-ness, and also for its majestic stability. The earth is perceived as a great and powerful goddess, and the entire cosmos is perceived as a great living being. This reverence for the goddess continued also in later ages. According to a later Indian myth, a demon named Hiranyaksha or 'golden eyed,' on one occasion kidnapped the earth goddess, and dragged her into the bottom of the ocean. The gods all appealed for assistance to Vishnu the preserver of the cosmos, who assuming the form of a wild boar plunged into the ocean, and battled with the demon for a thousand years before ultimately slaying him.

The Mother Goddess is also identified with Prakriti the primordial matter or nature, a concept which appears in Samkhya philosophy. Samkhya is a school of Indian Philosophy which accepts the dualism of *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, or spirit and primordial nature."

Cyril Veliath refers to Devi Mahatmaya, and gives a more comprehensive explanation of the conceptualization of the mother goddess in the Indian religious culture. She notes; "One of the most important texts dealing with the Mother Goddess, is the Devi Mahatmya. This text which scholars have declared to be roughly 1500 years old is also referred to by various other names, such as Durga Mahatmya, *Chandipatha, Chandi Saptasati,* and so on. It is a poem of 700 verses written in 13 chapters, a long hymn in praise of the Mother Goddess who is referred to as *Shakti*, and who descends upon the earth from time to time to rid the world of demons and evil-doers. This Devi Mahatmya is itself a part of another famous text, namely the Markandaya Purana.

According to the Devi Mahatmya, the earth is filled with the goddess *Shakti* (11.5). She constitutes every created object (11.6). According to another text namely the Devi Bhagavata Purana, she is

said to be present everywhere, right up from the creator god Brahma, down to a blade of grass (1.9.31-32). She proclaims to Vishnu that she is everything that is seen (1.15.52). At the time of the dissolution of the earth she is said to withdraw the earth into her womb, and she exists as the seed of the earth until the next creation, when she will grow and blossom forth again (3.3.54-55). Just as a spider weaves its web out of its own body, the Mother Goddess Devi or *Shakti,* creates the entire universe, out of her own body. The Devi Bhagavata Purana states that the Mother Goddess symbolizes all reality. The earth is her loins, the ocean her bowels, the mountains her bones, the rivers her veins, the trees her body hair, the sun and moon her eyes, and the nether world her hips, legs, and feet."

In another scripture Lalita Sahasranama, the symbolic names the Sahasranama mention staggers sociological implication about the concept of Mother-Goddess. The symbolic names are virtually identical with the original Vedic concepts. In this scripture, she is referred to by various symbolic names, such as *Sarvamayi*, or 'she whose form is all *Kshetrasvarupa*, or 'she whose body is matter,' Jadatmika, or 'she who is the world,' *Vishvagarbha*, or 'she whose womb contains the universe,' *Bhumarupa*, or 'she whose form is in all existing things'. She is also called '*Mahi*' and '*Dhara*,' which are two common names for the earth. In Kashmir too earth is called the 'Mother Earth, of which we are born'. Not only that the geographical identity of Kashmir is also called Mother Kashmir or "*Moej Kashir*" in Kashmiri dialect.

Vedic Tradition

The Indus Valley finds include hundreds of female figurines, which the archeological sources identify with deities. Some are inefficiently made of terracotta, while others are ingeniously made of bronze, as for example the famous 'dancing girl.' The male statues in comparison are rather few in number, and some scholars have expressed the view that there was perhaps a female statue existent in every house. Had Mother worship not found a significant place in religions of ancient civilizations traced to Harappa, the purest, the most sublime, natural and attractive relationship of *Jiva* and *Ishvara* could hardly have come in the grasp of man. This universal fact of mother-child relationship clearly owes its origin to the early Vedic and Tantric times

Archeological studies have now gone far beyond the Indus Valley civilization and the proto-history of the north of India, which is now

regarded as a continuum of Harappan-Saraswat-Indus Valley-Burzahom cultures of the north India, is stretched by fresh archeological research to Seventh Millinuim. How did the concept of Mother Goddess grew across such a long time is open, and over such a wide geographical expanse, is yet being investigated. Therefore, it has been decided to trace the evolution of the Mother Goddess from its beginnings in the Vedic civilization, which is formed the centre of the cultural growth of the whole of the north of India unto Vindyas in the south.

Shakht

This study in Shakht has a more specific objective, which is now needed to be emphasized. Latest Archeological research, have established;

1. the existence of the river Saraswati;
2. the cultural linkage between the Hakara, the Harappans, Sind Valley, Kashmir and the cultures which grew along Ganga formed one civilizational identity.
3. the Rig Vedic, conceptualization of the spiritual experience of the people of the north of India, including Kashmir, forms the ground work of the religious culture of the north India.
4. Tantras could not have evolved as an expression of a separate theology because, whole of the north of India was a one-single civilizational identity of spiritual experience.

The truth is that pre-Vedic and post-Vedic delineation of the Hindu civilization of India is no longer accepted as a valid fact. The Aryan migration was a myth perpetrated by the British historians of the Indian empire and their European contemporaries.

Dr.M.K.Teng writes in the introduction of my book, Kashmir—Hindu Shrines; "During the last several decades' evidence has come to surface, which does not corroborate with the methodologies that underline the identification of the early history of Hindu India with the race movements. Serious doubts have been cast on the validity of the whole methodological framework of the Aryan migration into India and the evolution of the Hindu India into a constellation of racial cultures, in perpetual conflict with each other. Questions have been raised about the racial conflict between the Aryans and the Dasyus, which is believed to have determined the course of the evolution of the Sanskrit civilization of India. Historical fact and data have been unraveled, which necessitate a fresh mapping of the race movements in India on a more

scientific basis." He writes further; "The archeological explorations carried on by the Archeological Survey of India and survey studies conducted by their expert bodies in Kashmir, Punjab and Haryana have led the discovery new facts about the ethnic composition of the cultures that flourished in north India in ancient times and their historical continuity. The excavations carried on by the Archeological Survey of India over a number of Neolithic sites in Kashmir, have unraveled facts which establish the ethnic affinity of the Neolithic—later stone-age people, whose skeletons were found at Burzahom in Kashmir, the people of the Harappan culture and the people who lived along the banks of the legendry river Saraswati, before the emergence of the Vedic age."

Rig Vedic Hindus, living in the space-time continuum of the Saraswati-Harappan-Sind Valley cultures, of which Kashmir, Ghandra in the north-west, the whole expanse of central India in the south and the Hill country of India, had conceptualized universal existence as the expression of a single reality—the Parmatman, of whom force-energy was a part and an attribute. Parmatman and in him the force or energy, were the sole source of creation, its sustenance, and was governed by the dissolution it suffered. The force or the energy, which formed a part of the Parmatman or was inherent formation, an attribute of the Parmatman, which they described as Shakti in early Vedic, symbolized the creation, which without the Parmatman exercising it, could not have led to the creation of this universal existence. The Rig Vedic people worshipped the Parmatman and the Shakti—the God and the Mother Goddess with the same reverence. Infact, the worship of the Parmatman, the personification of God is the worship of Shakti, the personification of Mother Goddess. Dr. Teng notes; "that the Rig Vedic people were perhaps, the first of the people among various civilizations, who were able to conceptualize force as Parmatman—which are same but act differently."

Research in Indian history has still to establish the anthropological attributes of the pre-history of the Hindus. Perhaps, the early Hindus, the proto-Aryans were Mother Worshipers. J.N.Kaul 'Kamal' writes in the introduction of 'Bhavani-Nama- Sahasra Sututih' "Besides the prehistoric evidences of Aryan being Mother Worshippers, the Vedas gives the appellation *Aditi* for the Prime Mover. To date the twice born meditate on *Gayatri,* the Divine Mother of trichotomous nature, after daily ablution. The *Tantras* advocate *Shakti* as the origin and source of all that we see. It is through Her grace that the Divine is revealed to

the earnest aspirant. This worship of the Mother Goddess prevailed all over the Indian subcontinent from the early times, traces of which are substantiated as under;

(i) Statues and figurines of the Mother Goddess at Mohanjodaro—prehistoric terracotta seal from Harrappa—similar objects unearthed at the prehistoric sites (circa 2750 BC) in the Indus Valley.

(ii) Rig Veda contains hymns to *Aditi* and the like.

(iii) *Agamas—Bhavaninamasahasra*, a page from *Rudrayamala Tantra*, became popular among the Kashmiri Pandits who practiced *Shakti Upasana*.

(iv) *Puranas— Lalitasahasranama* and *Devi Mahatmaya* are from *Brahmanda Purana* and *Markandeya Purana* respectively.

(v) Existence of a large number of *Shakti Peethas* all over India, among which Sharada, Trisandhya and other Peethas exist in Kashmir. The popular *Kul Devis* of Kashmiri Pandits have from early times been Rajina, Sharika, Bhavani, Jvala, Sharada and Tripurasundari."

A clearer picture of the worship of the Mother Goddess emerges from the introduction to the Mother Goddess in the book Tripursundari—The Mother Divine, written by C.L.Tikku and Lalita Tikku. In their introduction the authors write; "The evidence collected from different archaeological sites in India suggest that from the pre-historical times the early Hindu religion was a kind of nature worship. The personified focus of nature were given the name father Dyaus, the shinning God of sky and mother Prithvi, the earth Goddess and were the guardian deities full of affection, love and veneration for all. With the passage of time this concept developed into 'Mother Earth', 'Universal Mother,' Supreme Mother', 'Mother Goddess', 'Ancient Mother' worship. This change was prevalent in early human cultures in India probably because of the fact that they regarded mother as the real founder of the family system and having a dominant role to play with regard to progeny. Based on the discovery of figures of Mother Goddess with conspicuous feminine parts of the body indicating productivity and nourishing element of the woman, people developed strong faith in the cult of Mother Goddess. Number of deities in different forms and manifestations came up in different parts of India and attained the status of Goddess with embodiment of powers underlying creation and responsible for protection of the universe. This concept spread without break and became more deep rooted. Gradually with the widening of the

scope the people of India side by side with worship of Mother Goddess started to worship a male God, Shiva. The worship of Shiva and Goddess Shakti became very popular and continue even today."

They write further, "Myths and the legends of the Gods prevalent amongst the Dravidians survived the Aryan impact and with some improvements based on original Athar Vedic ritualism have been absorbed in the myths of Gods worshipped by Hindus under the Tantric system. The Goddess is taken as the symbol of supreme eternal power."

The authors proceed further and point out; "Rig Veda, the oldest record of Aryan civilization available is a treasure of knowledge on philosophy and the religion of Hinduism. The concept of God is very well brought out in these Vedas. The Aryan instantly perceived the existence of one mighty force, which they felt to be all pervading, that kept this universe going. Seeing the brilliant sky or the shinning sun or the blazing fire—they saw in them their living God, felt God and understood God. They called their God as Agni, the God of Fire, and the immortal, not self existent being, regarded Him as supreme and absolute, and possessing great powers, protector king dwelling in every abode. Later he was named Rudra (brilliant as sun) his attributes are clearly defined by numerous legends. He is the intelligent, strong and most beautiful and in course of time he was addressed as Shiva (the Auspicious)—the great Vedic God. From their feeling and perception of nature's beauty and grandeur their heart became sublime and from sublimity was born devotion and from devotion, ecstasy. As per the legends available in Vedas, when Aryans worshipped Agni they did not worship the material fire that burned but the great unknown power or the energy or the force expressed through all manifested phenomena—Shakti, that lay hidden in that blazing fire. In the Hindu religious practices Shakti is the religion of the Goddess. Idea underlying the cult is that the Goddess is supreme and pervades everything by Her nature as Shakti (energy) expressed through all manifested phenomena."

The Bhavani

Mother Goddess in Kashmir is the Proto-Aryan conceptualization of the force which inherits in God to run this universal existence. Somehow there appears to be belief among proto-Aryan people that *Parmatman* and force are inherent in each other and act in consortium to create this world and give it order in momentum and then absorb it in them-selves.

It needs to be noted here that conceptualization of life, the Vedas believed is an expression of a fundamental truth that the whole existence has a single source, the *Parmatman* and a force inherent in it and a part of it.

In the Kashmiri religious tradition God is personified in the form of mother, as he is considered to be the progenitor of the universe as well as the power that is inherent in him. The God is omnipotent, so is the Shakti which forms a part of Him.

The issue is the conceptualization of the *Parmatman* in the form of the mother. That is evolved in Kashmir to the extent of identifying mother as an inseparable part—the Shakti of the *Parmatman,* is probably the most mystifying part of the Hindu cultural heritage of the Hindus of Kashmir, and the process has been moving in one direction from the Vedic era of the Kashmir history, across its Puranic era.

In the history of Kashmir, religious concepts grew into a uniform religious lore. The period through which history of Kashmir has grown, the unbound boundaries of its religious culture has come into contact with varied religious conceptualizations, which flourished in the geographical environment spreading in all the four directions, north, south, east and west, along with the other tribal, parallel and plural religions, traditions of more organized religious communities, or less organized religious communities, such as tribal groups of all descriptions, the Nilmat Purana refers to. Considerable interaction occurred between the Vedic mainstream and the tribal groups and such cultural identies. Nilmat Purana is a faithful reflection of these interactions—both friendly and hostile. In Kashmir, as in India, uniformity of any form is altogether absent.

The Vedic tradition of the divine Mother—the Mother Goddess of the universe lingered on and found expression in the Indraksi Stotram. In his foreword to Indraksi Stotram translated in English by Janki Nath Kaul Kamal, S.Sankaranarayanan notes; "In the Veda, Indra is the paramount God. He is higher than all the cosmos, *Visvasmat Indra uttarah,* proclaim the Vedic Rishis. His Shakti, the executive power, his consort Indraksi, the vision of Indra. Vision extended as in heaven, *diviva caksur atatam*, says the Veda. Indra is over –lord of our triple existence. His Force is Indraksi. He wields her as his weapon *Vajra*. So she is known as *Vajra Vairocaniya*, the special light born of thunder. She is the thunder destroying all anti-divine forces. She is the hidden radiance in the heart of cloud. Through her, Indra sees everything. Ruling over the Divine Mind, she acts through the human mind, in the sense behind the senses."

The Indraksi Stotram brings to surface the spiritual significance of the Mother Goddess. Janki Nath Kaul's translation is incisive, revealing, and there can hardly be an abler attempt to provide an exposition of the Stotram. In his introduction he makes an interesting comment, which sheds considerable light on the evolution of Vedic tradition. He writes; "In Tantra and Purana Indra's part is taken by Rudra, the powerful, who brooks no obstacles. Indra is also called *Marutvan*, leader and host of *Maruts,* the stormy gods or life-powers." Indra's spouse, Indrani is the predominating power of *Sattva* that keeps him within positive limits, in non-normative existence where there is either no 'good' and no 'bad' or both are present simultaneously with Indrani dividing the fundamental line between them. The greatest of the philosophy which postulates of the Hindu religious culture is that the fundamental line between the good and the evil is drawn the expressions of a higher mental plane like that propounded in Bhagwad Gita. Indra and Indrani represent mind and intellect respectively, for it is the positive reasoning that makes the receding mind change its wrong course and follow what is right and good. Indrakshi is therefore, the harmonizing power of Indra, or the presiding deity of all gods.

The Indraksi Stotram narrates;
Mother Goddess is:
Katyani; "The sum-total of the light of all deities."
Mahadevi; "The self- luminous supreme deity."
Candaghanta; "the sound of devotion, Sabda Brahma."
Mahatapa; "The beatitude of penance."
Gayatri; Mother of Agma and Nigma, "the revealer of ultimate truth to seeker."
Savitri;"The creative power of giving birth to the universe."
Brahmani; "Spouse of Brahma, the God of creation."
Brahmavadini;"The propounder of knowledge of Brahman, the supreme self of all."
Narayani; "The immeasurable power of Narayan."
Bhadrakali; "The testimony of dissolution in contrast to the creative power in nature."
Rudrani; "spouse of Rudra."
Krsnapingala;"The sychronisation of the power of white and black."
Agnijvala;"The flame of knowledge."
Raudramukhi;"face of Rudra, the God of dissolution."
Kalaratri;"dissolution of duality in darkness."

Tapasvini; "The devotee's effort for self-realisation, the Tapa."
Meghasyima; "Depth of the darkest cloud."
Sahasraksi;" The beholder of the universe with her thousand eyes—the divine sight."
Visnumaya; "The insurmountable Divinity."
Jalodari;"primal cause of matter with water content."
Mahodari; "The deity with belly to absorb all kinds of manifestation, physical, mental and causal into Her own self."
Muktakesi;"The remover of gross, subtle bondage of the sense of duality in Jiva-Consciousness."
Ghorarupa; the face of the Goddess adopted to destroy evil spirits and "Maintaining harmony of the laws of nature."
Mahabala; "All powerful –omnipotent."
Ananda; "The divine bliss."
Bhadrajananda; "Mother of the infinite peace and grace."
Rogahartri; "healer of all diseases."
Sivapriya; "The loved deity of Shiva."
Sivaduti; "She who commissioned Shiva as Her messenger."
Karali; "annihilator of ego."
Pratyaksa; "The power of Yoga."
Paramesvari; "Supreme self of peace and bliss."
Indrani; "The primeval energy who guides Indra."
Candrarupa; "goodness—ecstasy."
Indrasaktiparayana; "power of Indra to destroy evil.'
Mahisasurasamhartri; "Destroyer of the demon Mahisasura."
Camunda; "The terrific form of Durga."
Garbhadevata; "The self-luminous power of actuating manifestation."
Varahi; "The spouse of the third incarnation of Vishnu Avatar Varha."
Narasimhi; "The expression of compassion of the Divine Mother through the assumed form of Narasimha, to save the devotee Prahlada."
Bhima; "Form of Durga in which she destroys evil."
Bhairavanadini; "guide of the path of spirituality."
Srutih;"revelation in the Vedas as the knowledge of Brahman."
Smrtih; "The memory for the dispersion of spiritual knowledge."
Dhrith; "The divine power of concentration on the comprehension of the infinite Brahman."

Medha; "power to comprehend the supreme consciousness."
Vidya; "The knowledge of supreme self."
Laksmi; "Deity of fortune and fairness."
Sarasvati; "The goddess of supreme knowledge and divine light."
Ananta; "The infinite power of consciousness."
Vijaya; "victory over evil."
Purna; "The power of accomplishment."
Manastosa; "Goddess who bestows the power of harmony to the mind."
Aparajita; "The unconquerable deity."
Bhavani; "bestower of the power of being; the creator."
Parvati; "spouse of Shiva."
Durga; "Goddess who grants Moksha—-'freedom from transmigration."
Haimavati; "witness of all creation."
Ambika; "power of austerity and affection."
Asiva; "who hides the truth from the Asuras."
Siva;" The embodiment of bliss, ever new and absolute. She is the transparent medium of divine activity."
Bhavani;"The bestower of life to Bhava or existence, desire and dread."
Rudrani;"who has the power of dissolution."
Sankarardhasaririni; "The consort of Sankara."

Since scientific investigation into conceptualization of the Mother Goddess, an embodiment of the Vedic reality behind the creation of universe or an essential part of it has not been attempted so far, we are not on firm ground about the way and course the concept of the Mother Goddess took during the incredible span of time of the Upanishads, the Brahmanas, unto the Puranic India. It can only be said that the concept of Mother Goddess assumed the aura as well as the meaning of the essence of the Parmatman. That is infact a character feature of the continuity of the religious thought of the Hindus and a part of the continuity of the Hindu civilization.

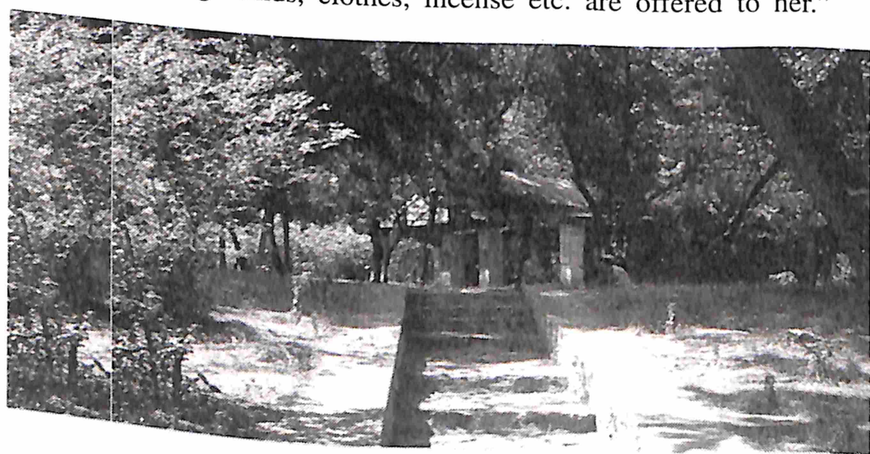
The Indrakshi Stotram has been sighted to establish the conceptual continuum of the Mother Goddess as a conceptualization which has a Vedic basis, besides being enriched by the Upanishads and Brahmanas and Puranic content. The continuity is endured. The Indrakshi recognizes this Puranic conceptualization of the Avtaras. It places the Mother Goddess into a position of a reality, the concept of Mother Goddess as the basis of the Hindu religion.

What is needed to be emphasized here is that, the research in the antiquity of Mother Goddess in India must be made within an Indian frame of reference with a methodological design which is evolved in the light of the Indian civilization. The Mother Goddess conceptualization in India has the basis of the mother who gives birth and who sustains and protects. It is not the deity of fertility, however, past we go in the study of Anthropology. It is not separated from such historical generalizations which of course are inspired by the English historians of the British Empire. There are number of myths, legends and ancient traditions available in world, which indicate, female in various forms as the object of worship. The research in conceptualization of the Mother Goddess will not be able to reach a more fundamental truth. In no country worship of Divine Mother is so deep rooted and universal, as in India where Shiva-Shakti cult developed into what is called the Shakti cult and spread through the length and breadth of India. The truth is that, in course of time, this formed the basis of later Shaktism. This truth has been presented by authors of 'Tripursundri—The Mother Divine', as follows; "In India everywhere the concept of Shakti cult has influenced the religious-minded people and nurtured since time immemorial by the great saints and sages. Mother Goddess has been taken as Para Shakti—the supreme energy, Cit Shakti— consciousness and Adya Shakti— Primordial Shakti. Great saints and sages have cultivated Her unique manifestation. The ultimate reality is taken as the female Goddess. She creates this world from within Herself, protects it and finally destroys to start again. The philosophy behind all this myth is the truth that the energy of consciousness is the ultimate reality behind the universe. Shakti is taken as pleasing than all the pleasant things supreme, beyond the high and the great knowledge and is superior to heaven—which lies at the feet of Divine Mother. She centers on the ultimate reality Shakti cult in the form of compassion, love and protection, which is associated with the idea of Mother. She is older than Bhrama, Rudra, and Vishnu and is Goddess of wisdom. The three Vedas, three fires, three energies, three worlds and whatever in this world is three-fold belong to Her. She is triple natured because She has the nature of Shiva, Shakti and Atman. She has three forms, the physical, the subtle and the supreme formless and infinite.

It is Shiva or Shakti or Shiva-Shakti and is the nature of pure consciousness. Shakti is the power of Shiva conceived as his spouse and as the Mother of the universe. In fact God is regarded under the twin aspect one called Shiva, the static aspect of consciousness and the

other the divine spouse called Shakti, the kinetic aspect of the same. Shakti cannot exist without Shiva and without Shakti, Shiva has no existence. Shakti is inseparable from Shiva. They are two in one or one in two."

Nilmat Purana provides evidence that during the Nilmat era, Mother Goddess was recognized the supreme deity and was even venerated more than Shiva. Nilmat Purana explains," Of Shiva's female-consort Uma, the Nilmata speaks so highly as to give her a position higher than that of Shiva. The land of Kashmir is described as her material manifestation and she is further stated to have taken the form of Kashmir most famous river Vitasta. Daughter of the mountain Himalaya, she is stated to have been originally blue-complexioned but became fair after performing penance on a mountain peak later named as Gaurisikhara. Reference to her marriage is also made and her association with Shiva, it is said, has made her purer. Her worship is prescribed on various occasions under different names such as Durga, Shyama, Sati, Bhadrakali etc. Vegetables, fruits, roots, various kinds of drinks, jewels, garlands, clothes, incense etc. are offered to her."



Temple at Balahome

The Purana proceeds further, "As regards the origin and development of this Goddess Uma, she is mentioned for the first time in the Kena Upanishad. In the Taittiriya Aranyaka, she is regarded as the wife of Rudra but is different from Durgi (Durga) who is referred to as Kanya Kumari and with whom she is identified in the Mahabharata. Different names of Uma in the Puranas have been taken by Dr. Bhandarkar to indicate different goddesses who owed their conception

to different historical conditions and were afterwards identified with one goddess." The Purana observes further, "The Nilmata further refers to the worship of books in the temple of Durga. It is somewhat surprising because the worship of books, we know, is generally associated with Saraswati— the goddess of learning known as Sarada in Kashmir."

During the Nilmat era in Kashmir the worship of Mother Goddess Lakshmi was no less important. Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu, was born from the sea and Nilmat Purana mentions it, "Called by the names Sri, Lakshmi, and Karisini, she is capable of purifying three worlds and at Kashyap's request, takes the form of a river Visoka to purify the people of Kashmira. Her worship is prescribed in many festivals like Sukhasuptika, Rama's birthday, festival of Iramanjaripujana. Sri Pancami—fifth day of the bright half of Caitra— is wholly dedicated to her worship. The purifying abode of auspiciousness, she is Supreme Power assuming forms of different goddesses. She is also identified with Uma and Kasmira."



Bhavani, Tikker, Kupwara.

What adds to the reverence of mother goddess enjoyed in Kashmir is that, besides Uma and Lakshmi, Nilmat Purana mentions mother goddesses, many of whom were of the Vedic tradition. More importantly after the draining of Satisar by Kashyapa, he requested many goddesses to assume the form of rivers in Kashmir, which they did to wash the sins of the people of Kashmir. It was Rig-Vedic tradition that rivers were regarded as goddess. In the Rig-Veda, the rivers are

regarded as deities and are spoken of as purifying the worshippers physically and spiritually. Vitasta Mahatmaya records that, "Goddess Uma, Laxmi, Aditi, Sachi, Diti, Ganga and Karishni had come to Satisar along with their spouses to see the draining out of the water and elimination of Jalodbhava. Rishi Kashyapa requested them to bless the land by assuming the form of water to purify it from the sins of demons as he considered Sati Desh most sacred and pure." As recorded in my publication, Kashmir—Hindu Shrines, Rishi Kashapa approached Uma first and assumed the form of Vitasta. "Rishi Kashyap then prayed to Goddess Laxmi. The Goddess appeared at the foot of Kramsara, Vishnu Paad and became known as Vishoka, meaning without grief. She was joined by Ramya at Tokna. Both of them joined Vitasta at Ghambheera or Sangam below Bijbehara. Vishoka of Shorash Naga,or Shesh Nag. The water of Shesh Nag joins Lambodhari, Lidar at Pahalgam. Lidar meets Vitasta between Khanabal and Bijbehara. Aditi, the mother of Devtas, appeared in Brang Pargana and joined Vitasta at Aara Path. Shachi, the wife of Indra, assumed the form of a river and came to be known as Harsha Patha and appeared from Achabal springs. It also joins Vitasta at Aara Patha, besides numerous tributaries from Panzath, Brangi, Trikoti, Verinag, Sandran etc, forming the big Vitasta River. Ganga appeared in the form of Sindhu and joined the river at Shadipura, which is also called Prayag of Kashmir."

Among the Goddesses, "The most important group consists of river-goddesses, five of whom, namely, Vitasta, Visoka, Trikoti, Harsapatha and Candravati are identified respectively with Uma, Lakshmi, Aditi, Saci, and Diti. All these goddesses are stated to have assumed the form of rivers to purify Kashmira at the request of Kashypa."

According to Nilmat Purana, Ved Kumari, further states, "Upto now, the figures of Ganga and Yamuna only have been found in the Valley of Kashmira, but we may hope for discovery of those of other river-goddesses also. The inscription on the big Salhi fountain slab in Chamba, which shows figures of Ganga, Yamuna, Sarasvati, Vitasta, Sindhu, Vipasa, Satadru and probably also of Iravati and Candraghaga seems to have been written by a Kashmiri and if we may be allowed to make use of this hint, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the images also were the work of a Kashmiri artist familiar with tradition preserved in the Nilmata. Anyway, the river-goddesses—destroyer of sin and bestower of heaven and immortality—hold prominent position in the religion of the Nilmata."



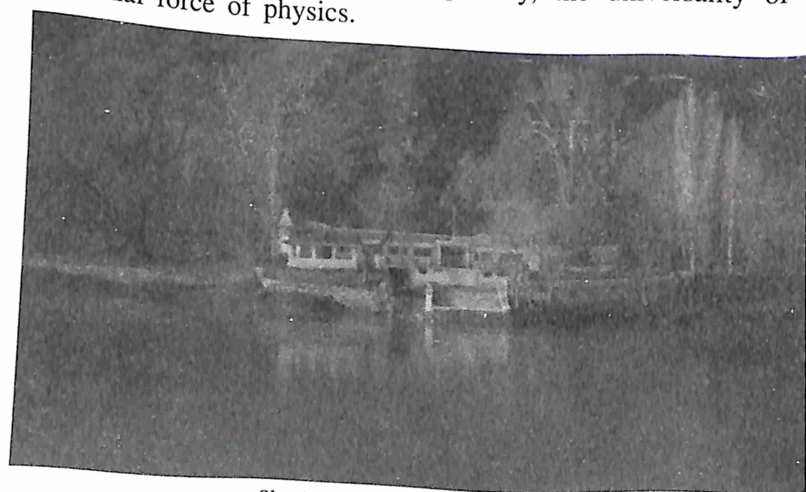
Mother Goddess, Hanand

Clearly the conceptualization of the mother goddess in the Hindu religious culture has its origin in the Vedic civilization and in a context which is original to the Indian civilization. The mother goddess was not a deity of fertility, the British historians and their European contemporaries, claimed, nor could the concept of mother goddess in India be explained in terms of primitive and rudimentary sciences of anthropology and sociology which were in the earlier part of the nineteenth century still in a stage of infancy. During the Puranic period and the age that followed, the mother goddess, indivisible part of the Parmatman of the Vedic era, became the indivisible part of the Puranic gods— Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, the mother goddess, who assumed various forms, which either depicted their functional attributes or their incarnations or not so often their creation for specific purposes, more specially for the purposes of fighting evil and destroying those who perpetrated evil.



Rajni Devi temple, Logripora, (Ashmuqam).

The Nilmat Purana provides a limit that the transition from the mother goddess concept and the assumption of the Puranic tradition was slow. The worship of the Shakht and mother goddess is essentially Vedic, which evolved into Tantric theology, probably after Upanishadic and the Brahmanic era of the Vedic age of the Hindu history. There is a mass of opinion, though yet to be scientifically investigated and evaluated, that the Tantras grew during or towards the latter period of the Upanishadic age. Unfortunately there is hardly any effort in India to investigate into the incredible time scale—almost a *Kalpa*, over which the Vedic age of the Indian history spread in a frame of reference which is basically Indian. The western scholars, who have conducted research to explain the features of the Vedic age even Puranic age, suffer from a complex of civilizational conflict. In her study Natalia Isayeva, Russian scholar, who makes an apt comment which is not an expression of an Indian concept in a frame of reference which is Indian, she writes in 'From Early Vedanta to Kashmir Shaivism'; "Yet one cannot totally escape the feeling that in every synthesis, in every harmony, however perfect it might be, something is missing. Every time philosophers try to bring together or connect diverse trends of thought, something is sacrificed, often the more colourful and intricate details, more exquisite embellishments. And it is often the case that those very details, presumed to be purely ornamental and superfluous, could have given birth to new ideas and theoretical notions." In an Indian frame of reference, no one could think of anything missing in the Vedantic harmony, where the premises is fundamentally singular, the expressions if they differ, qualify the same singularity, the universality of the gravitational force of physics.



Sheel Putri Temple, Baramulla

Therefore, Uma of Shiva, referred to in Nilmat Purana, Parvati, Durga, Sarasvati, Ragyna, Lakshmi, Mahakali, Jwala, the thousand names and attributes recounted in Bhavani Nama Sahasra or Durga Stutihi of Shankaracharya, describe one fundamental reality—as an indivisible part of Parmatman, the sole reality which this universe is—in whichever way in words they are described. This universal singularity is the basis of Shakht and later Shaivism. Tantras formed only a methodology with its own terminology to express the same truth. Tantras express no other truth than the Vedas—only the method and the accessories of language differ. The power of consciousness called Caitanya Shakti is not a separate entity from Shiva, the Supreme Consciousness. It is through attributes that the power of concentration on the absolute is developed and is beyond the power of thinking and speech. Shakti is also termed Sri Vidya. "In worshipping Her an adept is Shakta at heart, Shaivite in outlook and Vaishnavite in practice.

Devi Mahatmaya

The one fact, which appears to be imagined in the evolution if the Mother Goddess is that in the post-Vedic evolution of the Hindu religion, Mother Goddess assumed a rapid and widespread appearance all over the north of India, especially Kashmir. During the long integration in the religious history of India between Vedic era and Puranic period, the conceptualization of the Mother Goddess underwent great change, but no in-depth research has been conducted with religious evolution of the Hindu religion during this period, particularly on the evolution of the acceptability of the mother goddess as a divinity parallel to the post-Vedic *Ishwari.* The Mother Goddess in fact assumed the name of *Ishwari.* Much less is known about the worship of the Mother Goddess in Kashmir, as much more or less is known about the growth of the religious culture of Kashmir in the post-Vedic period, particularly the period preceding Puranic era. The variety and the abundance of the places of the worship of the mother goddess, shows that in the post-Vedic period, perhaps, even the Puranic period, Kashmir must have been a centre of learning in the worship of the mother goddess and the evolution of the form of the worship of Shakti—the Shakht.

The Devi Mahatmaya describes that the demons Shumba and Nishumba over powered the Devtas and seized their position and authority. The Devtas or the Gods approached mother goddess Shakti for deliverance from the demons Shumba and Nishumba. In order to

help Shakti in her fight against the demons, the gods created female counterparts of them-selves, and sent them out onto the battlefield along with Shakti. Each of these female counterparts resembled the god who created her. Brahma created Brahmani, Shiva created Maheshvari, Kartikkeya created Kumari, Vishnu created Vaishnavi, Varaha created Varahi, Narasimha created Narasimhi, and Indra created Aindri. These seven goddesses along with another goddess named Camunda devastated the demons together with Shakti. After the battle they drank the blood of the victims, and began to dance. This description is repeated in two other scriptures, namely the Devi Bhagavata Purana and the Vamana Purana. These seven goddesses, the consorts of the gods, however, were actually the different forms of the mother goddess who is named as Shakti or Devi. This is clearly stated in the text, because after Nishumba is killed, Shumba protests that her victory was due not to any power of her own, but because of the assistance she received from her many female allies. Shakti on hearing this declared that all the *matrakas* are merely her own different forms, and she proved this by absorbing them all into her own body.

According to the Devi Mahatmaya, the earth is filled with the goddess Shakti. She constitutes every created object. According to another text namely the Devi Bhagavata Purana, she is said to be present everywhere, right up from the creator god Brahma, down to a blade of grass. She proclaims to Vishnu that she is everything that is seen. At the time of the dissolution of the earth she is said to withdraw the earth into her womb, and she exists as the seed of the earth until the next creation, when she will grow and blossom forth again. Just as a spider weaves its web out of its own body, the Mother Goddess Devi or Shakti, creates the entire universe, out of her own body. The Devi Bhagavata Purana states that the Mother Goddess symbolizes all reality. The earth is her loins, the ocean her bowels, the mountains her bones, the rivers her veins, the trees her body hair, the sun and moon her eyes, and the nether world her hips, legs, and feet. The description is Rig-Vedic in essence, where the earth is considered to be mother form which everything originates, the indivisible part of the creation of the Parmatman.

The Mahatmayas, written in Kashmir, which have been dealt within a separate chapter in this study, provide an insight into the evolution of the phenomenon of the mother goddess in Kashmir and their worship. Only fifty-two of the many more Mahatmayas are extent now of which only a few have been translated into English. None of them, however, has been subject to investigation and research which

would have provided vital data and fact about the religious culture of Kashmir. Many of the Mahatmayas are dedicated to the worship of the mother goddess and the description of her shrines in Kashmir.

The Mother Goddess assumed the forms; it is now worshipped in India, in the post-Vedic period, perhaps, after the disappearance of the river Saraswati, of which the catastrophic consequences must have been felt all over the north of India. In the post-Vedic period (500BC) Vedic theology changed. The role of Devas was considerably reduced. A few who were retained were confined to Vedic rituals only. Brahman came to be recognized as the only God, who is transcendent but manifests through His immanent aspect called *Ishvara.* The three roles of *Ishvara* are manifestation of cosmos, its maintenance and dissolution at the end of *Kalpa*. In these three roles, *Ishvara* came to be recognized as Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. These Gods have their consorts as well. Saraswati and Gayatri are consorts of Brahma; Lakshmi is consort of Vishnu and Parvati consort of Shiva.

In the post-Vedic period, the Vedic god Brahman, the sole reality behind the universal existence, came to be recognized as the Parm-Brahman, the transcended being and the Apara-Brahman, or the *Ishvara*, the apparent being. Creation takes place due to his immanent aspect. This led to the recognition of Trinity of Gods; Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, representing the three aspects of this manifestation of this world. Brahma was recognized as the creator of the world; Vishnu who sustains it and Shiva who withdrew it at the end of *Kalpa*. Shakti, the goddess who was the indivisible half of the Vedic reality, the Brahman formed an indivisible part of the Brahma as his consorts in the form of Saraswati, the learning and Gayatri, the knowledge; the indivisible part of Vishnu as Lakshmi and the indivisible part of Shiva as Parvati.

Saraswati

Saraswati is depicted as a beautiful woman to embody the concept of knowledge. She possesses four arms, and is usually shown wearing spotless white and seated on a white lotus or riding a white swan. In Hinduism, Saraswati represents intelligence, consciousness, cosmic knowledge, creativity, education, enlightenment, music, the arts, eloquence and power. Hindus worship her not for "academic knowledge", but for "divine knowledge" essential to achieve *Moksha*.

Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge and arts, represents the free flow of wisdom and consciousness. She is the mother of the Vedas,

and chants to her, called the 'Saraswati Vandana' often begin and end Vedic lessons. It is believed that goddess Saraswati endows human beings with the powers of speech, wisdom and learning. She has four hands representing four aspects of human personality in learning: mind, intellect, alertness and ego. She has sacred scriptures in one hand and a lotus – the symbol of true knowledge – in the second. With her other two hands she plays the music of love and life on a string instrument called the *Veena*. Saraswati's birthday – Vasant Panchami – is a Hindu festival celebrated every year on the 5th day of the bright fortnight of the lunar month of *Magha*. Hindus celebrate this festival with great fervor in temples, homes and educational institutes alike.





Saraswati

Saraswati, the consort of Brahma, in the Brahmanas she is identified as Vagishvri, the source of learning, speech and knowledge. She assumes the forms;

(i) Vagdevi or Vagishvri, the goddess of speech and learning;
(ii) Vani, the goddess of speech;
(iii) Veena-Vadini, goddess of music;
(iv) Brahmi, the consort of Brahma; and
(v) Shardha; goddess who gives essence.

Lakshmi

Lakshmi is the Goddess of wealth, love, prosperity (both material and spiritual), fortune, and the embodiment of beauty. Lakshmi is also called *Sri* or *Thirumagal* .She is endowed with six auspicious and divine qualities, or *Gunas*. She is also the personification of the spiritual fulfillment. She is also called the goddess of fortune.

(a) *Samanya Lakshmi*; a girl standing on a lotus, with both hands holding lotus, it is in this form she accompanies Vishnu.

(b) *Vara Lakshmi*; a girl standing on a lotus with four arms.

(c) *Gaja Lakshmi*; a girl standing on a lotus with four arms carrying a lotus by one, a pot *Amrit* (nectar) by another, a *bilwa* fruit by another and a counch by her fourth arm.

(d) *Maha Lakshmi*; a girl standing on a lotus with eight arms carry a bow, an arrow, a mace and discuss in additional four arms.



Ancient StoneSculpture of Goddess Laxmi (Kashmir)



Coin depicting Gaja Lakshmi standing on a lotus, 1st century BC. Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu, assumes forms;

The various aspects which are attributed to Lakshmi as her Shakti's of Vishnu are;

(i) Sridevi—Her aspect of wealth and fortune

(ii) Bhudevi—Her aspect of earth and its fertility.

(iii) Saraswati—Her aspect of learning.

(iv) Priti—Her aspect of love.

(v) Kirti—Her aspect of fame.

(vi) Shanti—Her aspect of peace.

(vii) Tushti—Her aspect of pleasure

(viii) Pushti—Her aspect of strength.

Gayatri

Gayatri is a Vedic concept, which represents the collective knowledge of the Vedas. Gayatri is the symbol of the most important Vedic Mantra, Gayatri Mantra, consisting of twenty four syllables which are addressed to God Savitr, one of the three gods represented by Surya in the Vedic

period. She assumed the form of a goddess and came to be known as Veda Mata—the embodiment of the Vedas. She is having five heads and is usually seated within a lotus. She is another consort of Brahma.



Gayatri



Lakshmi Carved in Wood

Gayatri is not only one of the numerous gods or goddesses. It is the original creative energy of the Absolute Brahma, Gayatri has been called spiritual Triveni. The powers of *Saraswati*, *Lakshmi* and *Kali* are different. (1) *Yogis*, spiritual seekers, philosophers, devotees, philanthropists and those who have realized the Self adore the '*Hreem*' aspect of the Divine Mother *Saraswati*; (2) Intellectuals, religious preachers, social reformers, businessmen, labourers, industrialists, socialists, communists etc. are all engaged in search of '*Shreem*' power of *Lakshmi*;(3) Physical scientists are engaged in the investigation and worship of '*Kleem*' element of *Kali*. All these three categories of seekers are worshippers of one single emanation of *Adya-Shakti Gayatri*. This *Triveni* fulfils all the three aspirations, namely: spiritual, mental and physical. power, fame, wealth and divine brilliance (Brahma-tej).

The importance and glory of Gayatri is infinite. The ancient history, Purans, reveal that Rishis used to do yog Sadhana and tapascharya on the basis of Gayatri. Atharva Veda incorporates a prayer in praise of Gayatri stating that it grants longevity, energy, prosperity.

Parvati

Parvati is the consort of Shiva. As per Shiv Purana, Parvati was married to Shiva in her earlier incarnation, when she was born as one of the daughters of Daksha Prajapati and Parasuti. In that birth, also she had performed *tapas* to become Shiva's consort and was then known as

Uma. She burnt herself through the fire of *Yugna,* to avenge the insult her father had inflected on her, by not inviting her and her husband Shiva. Thus, she came to be known as Sati. Upon her death, Shiva became very sad and roamed in around with her body for a long time. Other gods could not see this pathetic site and requested Shiva to give up the Uma's body for a formal cremation, but Shiva refused.Thereupon Brahma requested Vishnu to disintegrated Uma's body with his 'Sudershan Chakra'. The parts of her body fell on earth and these places came to be known as *Peethas*—sacred places where goddess by various names became objects of worship. It is said Shiva, himself carried meditations at these places. Kashmir is one of the *Peethas.* There is a temple dedicated to Uma worship at Umanagri in Anantnag.



Parvati

Parvati wanted right from her young age to marry Shiva. She car ried long austerities and *Tapas* for this purpose. Her wish was fulfilled and she was ultimately married to Shiva on thirteen day of the dark fortnight of the month of Phalgun. The day of her marriage called Heerath—Shivratri is celebrated in Kashmir by the Hindus and is considered to be greatest of the auspicious festival enjoyed by Kashmiris. Parvati has two forms; the benign form of the consort of Shiva, wherein she sits by the side of Shiva, holding a blue lotus in one hand while the other hanging by her side. She has also a Rudra form.

She is worshipped in Kashmir in many forms.

They are;

(a) Annapurna—the giver of food.
(b) Aparajita—invincible Devi.
(c) Bala—a young girl whose place of worship is Balahome near Wuyan in Kashmir.

(d) Badarkali—the terrible form she was given by Uma to fight Daksha Prajapati.
(e) Bhutmata—mother of Butas.
(f) Jagad Dhatri—sustainer, of the world.
(g) Katayani—daughter of sage Kata .
(h) Manmohini—the fountain head of Yoga.
(i) Rajarajeshvri—Queen who rules queens.
(j) Chakreshwari—goddess with Sri Chakra, worshipped at Hari Parbat in Srinagar.
(k) Jwala—the origin of fire worship, at Khrew in Kashmir.

Durga

The Mother Goddess in Shakht, Shaivite theology and the Puranic tradition is symbolized by Durga. The Durga is the Shakti part of the Ishwara. She represents Shakti in Shaivism as well as in Vaishnavaism. She is the force behind every activity that goes on in the universe. She is personification of her Shakti, energy, aspect, Maya, illusion, aspect and Prakrti, physical, aspect. Durga is personification of Prakrati which is depicted by her association with the physical world. In her imminent aspect, she is depicted as earth. In her transcended aspect, she lives in heaven. In this way she looks as if she is the female aspect of Vishnu, who is also engaged in maintaining cosmic order in balance.

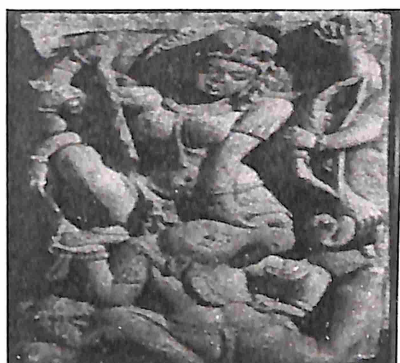
Durga manifests herself into three forms according to her Gunas—*Tamas, Rajas* and *Satava*. In the form of Mahakali, she has ten faces, ten feet, and ten hands, in which she wields ten weapons of destruction i.e. the sword, discus, mace, arrow, bow, iron club, lance, sling, human head and conch. This form represents her Tamas aspect.

In the form of Mahalakshmi, she has eighteen arms, and her eighteen hands she holds rosary, pot, a club, lance, sword, shield, conch bell, wine cup, trident, noose, and discuss—the Sudershan Chakra. This form represents her Rajas aspect.

In the form of Mahasarawati, she represents the Satava. She is bright as moon and has eight arms. In her hands, she holds the bell, trident, ploughshare, conch, pestle, discuss, bow and arrow. Among the Hindus of Kashmir, she represents Kaushiki Durga—the force which gives order to cosmos.



Dasabhuja Durga from Konark (now in British Museum, London)



Mahisamardini Durga (now in Philadelphia Museum of Art)

It is not reasonably correct to hold that Durga or her three forms are not Puranic adaptation of the Vedic deities; Parvati, Lakshmi and Saraswati. There is continuity in the incredible period of transition from RigVedic, Upanishadic, Brahmic and the Puranic Hindu religious culture of India, which remains down to this day, monistic in essence and content. Durga manifests herself in ten forms, which are all basically her in essence and mentioned in the Markendeya Purana as;

1. Durga: who entices away demons;
2. Dashbuja: with ten arms for the destruction of demons;
3. Simha Vahinee: who is seated on a lion;
4. Mahishasuramardini: who killed the buffalo demon Mahishasur;
5. Jagat Dhatree: protector of the man from the demons;
6. Kali: who killed Rakta-beeja, after she drank all his blood;
7. Tutakeshe: killer of demons;
8. Tara: killer of Shumbha;
9. Chinnamitka: killer of Nishumbha;
10. Jagadguru: who is worshipped by all gods."

Another aspect of Durga is Kali, the manifestation of her destructive aspect. She is an embodiment of Tamas, the aspect of energy responsible for dispersion, producing a void where everything is black. Thus, she represents a state where time, space and causation do not exist, as all colours disappear in darkness. Kali does not represent the destructive aspect of Durga alone. She is manifestation of protection and fearlessness.

Another Puranic manifestation of Durga is Tripursundri. She symbolizes the three *Gunas-Satava, Rajas* and *Tamas.* It is the power

(Shakti) of Durga, called Kundalini Shakti, represented by three and a half coils, each one standing for a different kind of Shakti. Thus, Jyestha Shakti represents supreme awareness, Rudra Shakti represents supreme power and Ambika Shakti represents supreme knowledge.

The Brahmanda Purana says that she manifested herself in the midst of disk effulgent light from the sacrificial pit, when Indra performed a *yagnya* to propitiate her. She chose to marry Shiva, with whom she is believed to live at Mount Meru.

According to the Tantras, she is the collective energy of Brahma Shakti, Vishnu Shakti and the Rudra Shakti. Hence she is the goddess of three worlds of creation, preservation and dissolution in the universe. It is said, that she is always wakeful in respect of blissful play of these three actions that relate to the whole universe. By her mere wish she throws out and withdraws the universe in its entirety. It is also said, that Goddess Tripursundri's sphere is triangular and whatever in the world is threefold belongs to her. All the triplets of sacred texts are contained in her. The more important explanation of her being is noted by Tickus. They note, "She is supreme consciousness that illuminates the three states of waking, sleep and dream. The three letters A,U,M—the knowable, knower and knowledge, the seer; sight and seen, hearing, thinking and concentration are her manifestations. Since she is everywhere in triplet she is called Tripursundri. She is trinayana, the three eyed one. She is above the three lights that is 'the moon,' the sun,' and 'the fire'. Also 'Tri' means three, the 'Nayana' means paths. The Devi leads the devotees according to capability her *sadaka* has. The paths are the five senses of action, the five subtle and gross forms of matter and the five vital functions with five senses of knowledge."

Sapta Matrikas

In her manifestations of Kaushila Durga, she created seven manifestations of Shakti from her body to help her while she was engaged in battle with the demon Raktabija. These seven manifestations of Shakti came to be known as seven little mothers—Sapta Matrikas These are;

1. Brahmi—Brahmani; the consort of Brahma.
2. Maheshvari; the spouse of Shiva.
3. Kumari; consort of Kumar.
4. Vaishnavi; the creation and manifestation of Vishnu.
5. Varahi; Shakti of Varah, the incarnation of Vishnu.
6. Narasimi; Shakti of Nirsimha, the incarnation of Vishnu.
7. Indrani; spouse of Indra.

The Tantras give a varied description of the Matrikas. According to Tantric tradition, the Matrikas, seven mothers represent Shaktis;

1, Brahmi: represented the primordial *Nada*—the energy of the manifested sound AUM
2. Vashnavi: represent the energy which gives shape to all created objects.
3. Maheshvari: represents the energy that gives individuality to the created beings in the form of their *Anta Karna*.
4. Kumari: represents the energy of intelligence.
5. Varahi: represents the energy of assimilation.
7. Indrani: represents the energy destructive of that opposes the cosmic law.
8. Chamunda: represents the energy of spiritual awakening as well as spiritual consciousness which leads to control of mind.



Sapta Matrika

Durga is worshipped in Kashmir in the form of Kul-Devis.

Four main Kul Devis worshipped by the Hindus of Kashmir are;

(a) Ragnya, (b) Sharika, (c) Jawala, (d) Maha Tripursundari

(a) Ragnya's abode is at Tulamulla.

(b) Sharika is represented by a stone smeared with *Sindur* (red oxide) at Chakreshwar on the western spur of the Hari Parbat hillock.

(c) Jawala's shrine is located at Khrew, near Srinagar. In the shrine is a *Shilla,* a stone smeared with *Sindur*, which is believed to have Sri Chakra marked on it.

(d) Maha Tripursundri is worshipped as Durga at Balahome near Srinagar.

Chapter VII

VAISHNAVISM

Vaishnavism as a thought process and a structure of religious imperatives, a part of Hinduism, grew from its Vedic origin as other thought process grew in India. A well devised research model to trace the evolution of various aspects of Hindu religion has not been developed so far because of the reluctance, which dominated the outlook of the British historians of the colonial era as well as the Indian intellectual elite which assumed power from the British, refused to recognize the continuity of the history of the Hindu civilization. Dr. B.L.Malla, writes in his book, 'Vaishnava art and iconography of Kashmir'; "It is in the Rig Veda only that Vishnu is depicted as taking three strides with the specific reference to his acquisition of heaven, atmosphere and earth. There are scholars upholding the view that Vishnu was originally a Sun god. When Surya attained a position in the pantheon of gods, it was conceived and regarded only a manifestation of Vishnu. As expounded by Gonda, Vishnu represented the processes in vegetative growth and fertility at large."

Vishnu assumed significant stature in the Brahmanas, where he acquired the divine power to preserve the world by incarnating himself to protect it, fought the evil and demons who perpetrated the evil. "Vishnu has also been identified with Aditya or Agni. He this way retains his solar character." In the Taittiriya Aranyaka and the Mahabharata, Vishnu is identified with Narayan and Krishna.

The Vedic hymns, as already noted, were passed on since time immemorial in accordance with the *Guru-Shishu Parampara,* succession from generation to generation. The Vedic hymns were memorized to be passed on to the next generation. The Vedas was formally put into writing 5000 years ago by Maharishi Vyasa. Many gods praised in the Vedas were actually the aspects of the one Supreme Being Vishnu,

whose glorification is recorded in Purush-Shakta—the most vital of the Vedic hymns.

According to Vedic tradition human beings are neither bodies nor minds, but pure spirit souls, inside bodies and minds. "The symptom of the soul is permanency and stability - it does not change. Therefore, as the soul passes through the different conditions of birth, infancy, childhood, youth and old age, we can also understand that the soul continues undisturbed by the final change of body at death. But after death, what happens to the soul? Does it go somewhere? The Bhagavad-Gita informs us that as the soul passed through different bodies in infancy, youth and old age, it similarly passes on to another body after death. The next birth is determined by the state of consciousness that one develops in this life. But it is not that we are condemned to eternal reincarnation, for Krishna assures in the Bhagavad-Gita that those who worship Him with all their heart and thus remember Him at the time of death do not take birth again in this world, but attain His supreme abode.

Karma is the material law of action and reaction. According to how one acts in this life, one will be rewarded in the next. Thus if one observes the principles of *Dharma* and leads a pious life, one will achieve a good birth full of material enjoyment. But if one disregards common sense and morality and acts in a licentious and self-centered way, one will take a miserable birth, perhaps even as an animal or plant.

Because there is a soul in every living thing, no one has the right to kill anything, not even an ant. To do so, makes one guilty of violating the right to live of other creatures, and thus one brings *karmic* reactions upon him. Since it is *karmic* reactions that keep one entangled in the cycle of birth and death, anyone desiring liberation will have to avoid killing at all costs."

There is a harmony in universe inspite of its *Prakractic* nature, which is brutal and life depends upon the consumption of another life. The spiritual truth is sought by the *Sadhana* to attain *Mukti* or liberation, after a whole lifetime of severe austerities and meditation. "The devotee, however, simply engages in serving the Lord. By His mercy the devotee attains liberation as soon as pure service begins. He does not have to wait for death to become free from the dualities of this material world. He gets to enjoy that freedom while still in this world. He always relishes transcendental bliss in ecstatic communion with the Lord by serving Him, remembering Him and chanting His holy names."

According to Vaishnavism, *Dharma* has a specific meaning. "Everything has a particular characteristic or propensity which is natural to it, which in fact defines the very nature of that thing. For example, fire

is hot and bright. Something which is cold and dark can never be termed "fire". Ice is cold and hard. A rose is soft and fragrant. Those qualities which are inseparable from a thing and which distinguish it from other things are called *Dharma*. Every entity has its inseparable *Dharma*. As explained earlier, our most essential identity is the soul. What, then, is the essential characteristic, or dharma, of the soul? The *Dharma* of the soul is service. Everyone renders service to someone. One has to serve his wife, his boss, his dog, his country, etc. And if one tries to avoid doing any service for anyone else, he'll still have to serve his own self, his own senses and mind. In any case, everyone has to serve without exception. The Sanatana-Dharma or eternal function of the soul is service to the Supreme Lord. When we engage in His service we are actually fulfilling our true service."

Bhakti is another name for service as all service is devotion to *Paramatman*. "*Bhakti* is devotion to God, but when we turn away from God and refuse to serve Him, our natural sentiment of *Bhakti* manifests itself as attachment for material things. Vaishnavism teaches us how to purify this natural tendency to love God by engaging us in regulated devotional service practices at the temple and at home. When we are free from all material identity and attachment, our *Bhakti* will fructify as *Prema*, or pure love of God. This is the highest religion and duty of the soul. This is its Sanatana-Dharma or eternal character. Devotional service is the means of obtaining self-realization. Self-realization is simply the platform of pure (materially unmotivated) devotional service. It is not that after becoming realized one does not have to do anything. It is only after realizing our spiritual nature that our real, eternal service begins."

According to Vaishnava philosophy, *Parmatman* is the source of all that exists, both material and spiritual. He is the divine source of everything. *Parmatman* expresses his divine being in two ways;

1. "The original Supreme Personality of Godhead is the original source of all manifestations. Everything is resting on Him like pearls on a thread. Although the original Supreme Personality of Godhead is the source of infinite manifestations,He never becomes diminished by their production - He remains ever the same. And He is always in the position of being original.
2. When the original Supreme Personality of Godhead expands Himself into plenary forms, these are in no way different from or inferior to His original self. The relation between them is like that of many candles lit from one original candle.The only difference is that one is original. In the same way, all the plenary expansions of Godhead is identical with Him. Since

Godhead exists beyond time and space, His different expanded Personalities have no beginning or end.The fact is that all of the Lord's Personalities exist in Him throughout all eternity.It is only because of our being in the material world that we have to use such terms as "expanded form" in order to understand their relationship. The many facets of a gem shine with different hues of colors, yet the gem is an integral whole. So, the many expanded personalities of Godhead are non- different from the original Supreme Personality of Godhead. Some of His expansions are only manifested in the spiritual world, but others are the *Avataras* or incarnations who descend into this world for our benefit."

True that the divine spiritual super-sought is always a spiritual expression and thus in a state of transcendental super consciousness, he is immanent in this world as *Parmatma* or the divine self. It is his supreme power which pervades in everything and sustains everything of the existence. He is present everywhere and he is witness and the guiding force of all the things. It is because of his omnipresence he is omniscient. "The impersonal Godhead is just an aspect of the Personal Godhead. A person can act in an impersonal way, but something impersonal can never be personal. Therefore personality is the source of the impersonal. The impersonal is simply the divine light or effulgence of Godhead. Seeing it, one should try to know its source – Vishnu."

The philosophical content of Vishnavism is mainly encroached in the Bhagavata Purana. The most profound doctrines of Vaishnavism, which combine in themselves the ancient wisdom of the Vedas, the philosophy of the Upanishads and the tradition of the Brahmans and the Aranyakas, and which form the broad structure of the Hindu religious culture, is the Bhagwad Gita. Gita represents the whole evolutionary process of the Hindu religion, in its precept, practice and its precedent. The philosophy of Bhagwad Gita is the source, from which the main tents of Vaishnavism are derived.

Bhagavata Purana gave a new and more energetic form to *Bhakti Yoga*—the devotion to the *Parmatman* and his incarnation of Vasudev. Vishnu is a manifestation of the *Parmatman*. Bhagavata Purana must be understood in the broader context of the Bhagwad Gita. *Virata Swaroop* represents the time and space and the elemental reality of the forces which give time and space their being the Supreme Consciousness and of the whole universal existence—a continuum which can be never defined in humanly created symbols of expression. Bhakti Yoga assumed a geographical dimension in the centuries that followed the

Puranic era which marked the most formative part of the evolution of the Sanskrit culture of India and in the process brought within its fold, Vishnu and his incarnations, Mother Goddess Bhavani, Shiva, and after the rise of Buddhism, even Buddha.

Agamas

Vaishnavism found a wider expression of its principles and postulates in the Agamas,treatises on several aspects of the Hindu religion which grew in India, as the Vedic theology and religious philosophy began to mature in its content as well as its contours. In their broader context Agamas remained within the broad framework of the main Vedic postulates, but went into related fields of inquiry and religious worship. In one fundamental respect the Agamas underlined the Vedic approach, perspectives and conclusion, the individual human being and his understanding of the universal existence, the cause of creation and all that is super-natural and lastly the relation of the super-natural with the individual and the need for what in the Hindu religion is called the libration—the *Moksha.*

Agamas are also known as Tantras.The Agamas are divided into three sections: The *Shakta Agama, Shaiva Agama* and *Vaishnava Agama.* The theological structures of Shakta, Shaivism and Vaishnavism are based on their respective Agamas. There are further sub-divisions among each of Agamas. The two divisions in the Vaishnava Agamas are the Vaikhanasa and Pancharatra. Both the Agamas glorify God as Vishnu. There are other two sub-divisions in Vaishnava Agmas: Pratishthasara and Vijnanalalita.

Pancharatras Agamas have seven sub-groups. They are; Brahma, Shaiva, Kaumara, Vasishtha, Kapila, Gautamiya and the Naradiya. The Naradiya section of the *Santi-Parva* of the Mahabharata is the earliest source of information about the Pancharatras. Vishnu is the Supreme Lord in the Pancharatra Agamas. The Vaishnavas regard the Pancharatra Agamas to be the most authoritative. They believe that these Agamas were revealed by Lord Vishnu Himself.

Bhakti-yoga is the foundation of Vaishnavism, or worship of Vishnu. Vaishnavas believe that Vaishnavism began with Vishnu as an expression of God's own nature and exists with him since eternity.

The name Vishnu, literally means, spreading in all directions or to pervade every –where. So Vishnu is that deity whose existence is in the whole universe. He is the Pervader. He is everywhere. He is also called '*Narayan*'. It consists of two words. '*Nara*' means water and '*ayan*' means house or the dwelling place. Thus, '*Narayan*' literally means 'he

who has water as his dwelling place'. According to our scriptures, Lord Vishnu, is reposing on the snake coil formed over the surface of sea. So, Vishnu is where water exists. Scientifically, where there is water there is life and there is world. According to Padam Purana says; "Sri Hari should be worshipped in '*Salagrama*', '*Mani*', '*Yantra*', '*Mandala*' or image form."

According to Rudra-Hrdaya Upanishad, the combination of Uma and Sankara is known as Vishnu. In the universe, the males represent Maheshwar and females represent Bhagwati Uma. The apparent universe is in itself the form of Uma and non-apparent universe the form of Maheshwar. The union of apparent –Uma and non-apparent Shanker is known as Vishnu.

In Northern India, Ramananda, Vallabhacharya, Nimbaditya, Sankaradeva and Chaitanya were the Vaishnava reformers of great repute. Ramananda is said to have been the fifth in apostolic succession from Ramanuja, and he lived towards the end of the fourteenth century AD. It is generally said that there are four main *sampradayas* or sects of Vaishnavism, viz., Ramanuja, Vishnuswami, Madhvacharya and Nimbaditya. All other current minor sects are said to have been included in these four main *sampradayas.* It is also said that Lakshmi acknowledged Ramanuja; Brahma Madhvacharya; Rudra Vishnuswami; and Sanak, Sananda, Sanatan and Sanatkumara Nimbaditya respectively.

Brahma-*sampradaya* is the second main Vaishnava *sampradaya*. Madhvacharya was the founder of this sect and the *sampradaya* is called *Madhvi* after his name. This sect is of a later date than the Sri-*sampradaya* of Ramanuja. Madhvacharya was born in 1121AD at *Sakabda* in Tulab in Deccan. Except *Sannyasis* and Brahmins no other people have any right to become a *diksha-guru* in this *sampradaya*.. Madhvacharis are Dvaitavadis. They acknowledge the separate entities of *jiva* and Brahman. They, therefore, differ from the philosophical conceptions of both Sankara and Ramanuja.

Jayadeva the renowned author of the *Gita-Govinda* flourished in the 12th century. Radha and Krishna were his objects of worship. His Gita-Govinda gave a great impetus to Chaitanya during his life and cult in the beginning of the 16th century.

The third main *sampradaya* is the Rudra-sampradaya, of which Vallabhacharya was the founder. He was born about 1749 AD in Telangana and settled at Muttra. *Balagopala* or the Child Krishna is the object of worship for the devotees of this sect. The *sampradaya* of Vallabhacharya traces its origin from Vishnuswami, the commentator of Vedas.

The founder of the fourth main *sampradaya* was Nimbaditya. He lived near Vrindavana. His original name was Bhaskaracharya. He was

called Nimbaditya later on, and people belonging to his sect, is called *Nimat.* Krishna with Radha is their God of worship, and the *Srimad Bhagavata* is their main scripture. Nimbaditya had two distinguished disciples, named Kesava Bhatta and Harivyasa. Two separate sub-sects owe their origin from these two.

Vaishnavism in Kashmir

Kashmir formed a part of the geographical heartland of Hinduism. It formed a part a part of the Puranic India as well. Vaishnavism grew in Kashmir as it evolved in the Hindu heartland and infact, assumed a pre-imminent place in Kashmir with the beginning of Nilmat era, a period which can safely be presumed to have begun with the epic age in India. Nilmat Purana deals with Vaishnavism in elaborate detail. It occupies an important place in the Nilmat Purana, which speaks of Vishnu more than any other deity.

"The Nilamata supplies ample information about the religious cults prevalent in ancient Kashmir. Some of these cults are centered on the Vedic gods Vishnu, Rudra etc. while others have folk deities as their basis. Buddhism is also mentioned not as a separate cult but as assimilated into Vaishnavism. The intermingling of different currents of religious thoughts is seen clearly and religion appears as a developing organism absorbing fresh elements and giving up some old ones, in the course of its development."

The Nilmat Purana is a Vaishnavaite text. It gives an elaborate account of Vaishnava cult in Kashmir. It can be said that the people of Kashmir shaped their ethnical pattern of life and their belief systems in consonance with the tenets of Vaishnava Dharma of Hinduism in Kashmir. The Nilmat Purana is full of praise for Vishnu, who the Purana accepts is honored by Brahma and Shiva also. The Nilmat Purana notes; "The ultimate cause of the universe, he pervades the whole universe and is always busy in rescuing the devotees from distress, showing them the right path, giving them boons and destroying *Danavas.* The vague memories of his inferiority to Indra in the Vedic period are preserved in his epithet Upendra in contrast to Mahendra of Indra. He pleases Indra and his title Janardana as a fighter comes in part from Indra. His solar nature is clear from his title Trivikrama and from his mention among the twelve suns." Nilmat Purana describes the appearance of Vishnu in the most eloquent syllables. It notes; "As regards the appearance and the weapons of Vishnu, Nilmata describes him as four-armed, four faced, lotus-eyed, having a complexion like that a blue lotus

or white snow, wearing white or yellow clothes, a crown of jewels and also ear rings. His weapons are conch, discus, club, lotus, sword and bow—the last one made of horn. He is waited upon by his weapons in human form also. He lies on the jeweled hood of *Sesa* with his lotus like feet placed in the lap of Laksmi. His mount is Garuda, the enemy of the Nagas."



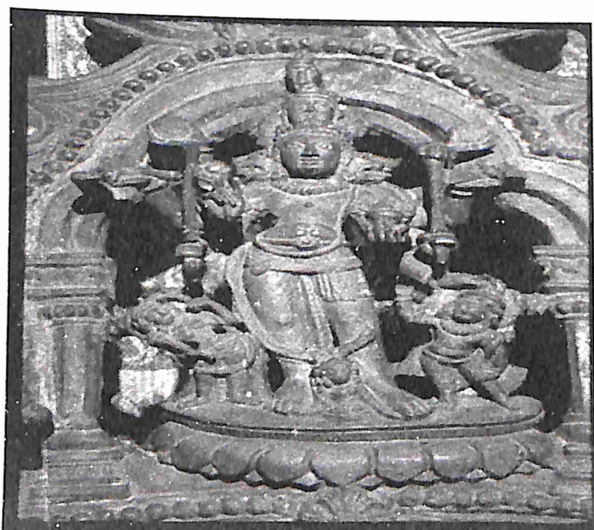
Different forms of Vishnu found in South Kashmir

Nilmata, infact, a very early treatise on Vaishnavism, mentions that the evolution of Vishnu was a process of integration of various Puranic schools of Vishnavism, which Nilmat Purana asserts must be integrated into one full-fledged philosophical and ritual structure by identifying the Vishnu deities they worshipped with the Vedic Vishnu, at an earlier date, than the rest of India. The most celebrated scholar, Ved Kumari Ghai notes in her study of Nilmat Purana; "Later on, however, when followers of these cults identified their respective deities with the Vedic Vishnu, the gulf between them and the Brahmans was removed to a considerable extent. In Kashmir it must have been removed at a quite early date and the Nilmata by mentioning together the Bagavatas, the Brahmanas and Pancharatra system of worship points out this happy mingling of Vedic and popular cults."

That it spread far and wide and proves beyond any doubt that Kashmir formed a part of the Puranic history of India. Ved Kumari Ghai notes;" Another piece of information from Rajatarangini that two ancient temples contain the images of Kesava were excavated in the period of king Lalitaditya, and the images, on the ground of the

inscriptions engraved on their bases, were interpreted as having been erected by Rama and Laksmana—the famous heroes of the Ramayana—reveals that those Vaishnava temples were constructed many centuries before Lalitaditya, so that the script had become too old to be known to the Pandits of the region."

The Kashmir valley was a seat of Vishnu in the form of *Cakrin,* says the Visnudharmottara Purana. It was deeply impressed by the Pancharatra school of Vaishnavism. Names of lakes like Visnasar and Krsnasar, mountain-peaks and places like Visnupada, Ramardhan and Chakaradar, are enough to establish the presence of Vaishnavism in Kashmir. Many images have been discovered from various centres in Kashmir establishing the popularity of the Bhagavata cult, which also falls within the ambience of Vaishnavism. Jayakhya Samhita, mentions that Pancharatra school of the *Satvatas* of Rama and Krishna, the two incarnations of Vishnu, gained considerable popularity in Kashmir and elsewhere. The theological aspects of the Vaishnavite sects in Kashmir must have settled down to a harmony by accepting the exclusion of the Vedic Vishnu to the Vishnu in Pancharatra School, the Vishnu of the Bhagavata School, and the school of Rama and Krishna Vasudev. The difference still remained. The cult of Bhagavatas came to accept Vasudev-Narayan as its supreme deity, while the Pancharatra school continued to worship four Vyuhas, namely; Vasudeva, Sankarsana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. Kashmir became a centre of Pancharatra school of Vaishnavism and left a deep impact on the people of Kashmir. It shaped their religious behavior and also invested them with new ideas of philosophical thinking.



Vishnu

The Vaishnava Dharma with Vasudev at the centre became a centre of Vaishnava Dharma in Kashmir. It is corroborated by Visnudharmottara Purana. Kashmir has been regarded as a cradle of early Pancaratra literature dealing mainly with Vishnu and Vyuhas. J.C. Chatterji notes in 'Kashmir Shaivism', "that some Vaishnava works had very strong influence upon the general public of Kashmir which is proved by the fact that a great philosopher Abhinavagupta had to present the tenets of Shiva philosophy in the grab of a Vaishnavaite treatise, Paramartha Sar."

Pancharata school in general has laid emphasis on *Jnana, Yoga, Kriya* and *Charya*. *Jnana* comprises philosophical doctrines in respect of god, nature and individual soul, the process of creation, and the modes of liberation. *Yoga* purports meditation and concentration with a view to obtaining release from shackles of body and mind. *Kriya* stresses the rules to be adhered to in the making of idols and in the construction of temples. *Charya* deals with the rules of conduct regarding rites, worship, festivals and social obligations. The major works of Pancharatra contain an admixture of philosophy and rituals, occultism, mysticism, magic, and ethics. The essential concerns of the Pancharatra School in *Samhitas* have been of *Sadhana* as a means to lead a devotee onto path of ascension.



Vishnu (Stone Sclupture 6TH Century, Kashmir)

An interesting aspect of Vaishnavism in Kashmir is the probable conceptualization of the composite form of Vishnu and Lakshmi as

Lakshmi-Narayan and composite form of Vishnu and Shiva, known as Hari-Hara. The iconography of Lakshmi-Narayan finds its mention in different texts. According to Dr. Malla, "In the Jayakhya Samhita, Lakshmi appears as a consort of Vishnu forming a pair not only with Vishnu but even with Vaikuntha. The Vaikuntha is accompanied by his consort Lakshmi. She is stated to have been seated on his left thigh, just as in the Lakshmi-Narayan images. This type is described in the Jayakhya Samhita as Lakshmi-Vaikuntha. The seated variety of Lakshmi –Narayan appears to have been more popular than the standing ones. According to the description of the Skanda Purana, Lakshmi should be seated to the left of Narayan. Our god holds the disc and the conch in his right hands while with his left arm he embraces Lakshmi. The Rupamandana describes Narayan as holding a lotus, and Vishnu riding a Garuda. The Kashmirian artists were perhaps fully aware of these textual prescriptions of Lakshmi-Narayan images, but did not follow them in totality as was done in certain other parts of India."

Possibly Hari-Hara provides an expression to the close coloration between the Shavites and the Vaishnavites. The conceptual basis of Hari-Hara is available in many scriptural and literary texts and epigraphically records. Dr. Malla notes;" The Hari-Hara images as a matter of fact were the consequence of the cult of Hari-Hara, which must have been obtaining not only in India, but in Kashmir as well. Vishnu and Shiva, as a result of fusion, were not posed as opposed to each other, but were taken as one out to do good to man in general. Such images bespeak of tolerance, amalgamation and syncretism. With the passage of time, Brahma was added to the already existing cult of Hari-Hara and the triad thus formed came to be known Hari-Hara-Pitamaha. It is not easy to pronounce whether there was a cult of the type of Hari-Hara-Pitamaha already existed which in turn left its imprint on sculpture as a whole. But there are ample evidences available which establish the fusion of Hari-Hara-Pitamaha underscoring the further development in matters of harmonization and syncretisation of various attributes of these three different deities."

Incarnation of Vishnu

The concept of incarnation is deeply entrenched in the Hindu mode of thinking and it attained the importance because of the Vaishnava thinkers, who elaborated its multi-form conceptuality. The Bhagawad Gita, as a Vaishnava work on philosophy is replete with the concept of incarnations, which is said to have undergone an evolutionary process

before becoming a full-fledged philosophical construct. The Satpata Brahmana as one of the earliest texts has alluded to only four incarnations, the *Matsya, Kurma, Varaha* and the *Vamana.*

Incarnation is also Vedic origin, and an apt remark has been made by Dr. Ved Kumari in her commentary on Nilmat Purana. She notes, "The theory may be traced to the Vedic idea that many gods are just one god, suggesting conversely that one god may be many. From this idea it was only one step more to the theory of incarnation, i.e., if one god can become many, he can also assume any form, human or animal—to achieve some special purpose." The Nilmat Purana does not enumerate the names of all the incarnations of Vishnu. Dr. Ved Kumari notes; "Only stray and disordered mention of the names of incarnations, sometimes accompanied by a brief account of their achievements is at our disposal. The names are; *Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Hamsa, Asvsira, Nrsimha, Trivikrama, Rama Dasarathi, Madhusudana and Buddha.*"



Varaha

Nilmat Purana has referred to multiform legends associated with Vishnu, who is recorded to have slain the demons Madhu and Kantaba, and then fought with Naraka another demon to release the elephant chief. The most important of his achievements, as far as Kashmir is concerned is the killing of Jallodhbhava demon that lived in Satisara Lake, which became the land of Kashmir after it was drained and the

demon was killed. In the study on Nilmat Purana, Ved Kumari observes; "*The* verses 1167- 1226 give the story of Parasurama who eliminated twenty one times all the Ksatriyas on the earth, to avenge the murder of his father. In the twenty first attacks, he followed the Ksatriyas to Kashmir and after killing them near the river Madhumati, he erected the image of Kesava which, as the Nilmata informs us, was worshipped by the people, with animal sacrifices. Thereafter he erected an image of Kesava on the mountain Grdhrakuta but as it was very troublesome for the cows to climb up the hill; Parasurama practiced pence for one year to please Vishnu to allow him to bring that image down to his hermitage. Vishnu appeared and granted the desired boon."

The incarnations of Vishnu are;

1. Matsya Avtara: Incarnation of fish.
2. Kurma Avtara: Incarnation of tortoise.
3. Varaha Avtara: Incarnation of boar.
4. Nar Simha Avtara: Incarnation of man-lion.
5. Kaman Avatar: Incarnation of dwarf.
6. Purshram Avatar: Rama with axe.
7. Rama Avatar: Incarnation of Ram
8. Krishna Avatar: Incarnation of Valued
9. Buddha Avatar: Incarnation of Buddha
10 Kalki Avatar: The future Avatar.

Sri Rama and Sri Krishna, the incarnations of Vishnu are worshipped in Kashmir widely. While the temples dedicated to Sri Rama are scattered all over Kashmir, the temples dedicated to Sri Krishna are less common. At many places the remnants of ancient stone temples are linked with Sri Rama and Sita, like Sita Kund at Khag and Sita Haran, a few miles away from Arizal in Beerwah district. An ancient temple dedicated to Sri Krishna is situated inside the Hari Parbat fort in Srinagar. The Dogra ruler, Maharaja Partap Singh, built Sri Krishna temple, better known as Shri Gadadahar temple, at Shergari palace, on the banks of river Jhelum. Two large temples dedicated to Sri Rama, were built in Srinagar, in recent times, one on the left side of river Jhelum, Raghunath *mandir*, near Habakadal and other Rama *mandir*, at Sathu, Barbarshah. A temple known as the Radha Krishna is located in the Lok Bhawan complex at Anantnag.

Kashmir has its own version of Bhagavata Purana, which stands preserved in Goetingen Museum Library in Germany. It is the oldest and authentic version whose date can be fixed as 14th century. The manuscript contains many *Shlokas* drawn from other earlier manu-

scripts. There is Kashmiri Bhagawad Gita and Ramayan as well. Many Kashmiri poets have written Krishna and Rama *Leelas* as a part of Kashmiri folk poetry and are sung even today.



Lakshmi-Vishnu riding Garuda, 11th century Kashmir

To what the ancient seers of the Upanishads had evolved after ceaseless contemplation as an abstract conception of God, Vaishnavism gave a concrete form to be easily understood and be accessible to all and sundry, so that even the humblest of the humble could come to Him, irrespective of caste and creed. The fountain-heads of Vaishnavism, the Gita and the Bhagavata, simply worked out the abstract propositions of Vedanta-Sutra and gave them a concrete shape and made them accessible to all. Vaishnavism has opened wide the portals of the temple of God to everyone from the highest to the lowest, and binds them with the sacred tie of brotherhood. In coming to the end, there cannot be any doubt as to Vaishnavism remaining always a living religion. The ground on which it stands and all-pervading, is based on eternal truths, such as love, *ahimsa*, humility, and at the same time unbending rigidity in principles, with overall devotion to God Who is Sat Cit and Ananda.

Chapter VIII

SHAIVISM

Shaivism is a part of the philosophical structure of Hinduism. Shivaite conceptualization of the whole universal existence revolves round the belief of one sole reality the Shiva—the absolute metaphysical reality, synonymous with supreme consciousness. According to Shivaite philosophy the creation is the expression of Shiva—the only reality in which the creation as well as the act of creation are inherent. "Shaivism recognizes Lord Shiva as the Supreme and Absolute Consciousness with Shakti (Parvati) as His dynamic energy through whom He controls all creation and its management."(Socio-cultural And Religious Traditions of Kashmiri Pandits by Piyaray Raina p.78)

Shaivism grew into its present form with the evolution of the Tantra lore, which evolved during post-Vedic period, in a wide variety of theological postulates and practices. Tantra is "in the broadest sense, a generic term for the various traditions, which express the whole culture of a certain epoch in Indian history. The contents are therefore, of an encyclopedic nature—religion, rituals, domestic rites, law, medicine, magic and so on and so forth." J.G.Woodraffe.

In Shaivite philosophy, Shiva is presumed to be the origin of five acts:

1. *Srshti*: he lets go out of himself the creation of this whole existence;
2. *Sthite:* he maintains what he has created;
3. *Samhara*: he re-absorbs what he has created;
4. *Vilaya:* he has the capacity to conceal himself in the oblivion;
5. *Anugraha*: he has the grace to bring about the liberation of man, merely out of love for him.

This process of the *Panckriya,* or five acts enumerated above, Shiva continues to perform in a *Kalpa*—a period of time and then do

it again and again, without any end. Of the process of the performing of his five acts, Shaivism, which developed in a form of religious philosophy and became a component of Hinduism evolved in three regions of India; Kashmir in the north, Kerala and Tamil Nadu in south, and Gauda in Bengal. The Shaivite traditions of these three regions are classified as follows;

1. *Kashmir Shaivism;*
2. Pashupati Shaivism;
3. Shaiva Sidanta;
4. Vira Shaivism;
5. Shiva Advanta;
6. *Siddha Sidhanta*;

In their philosophic content and practice, the Shivaite systems of philosophy differ in certain respects, but in general, are grounded in the same basic foundations. Kashmir Shaivism is monistic and along with the other systems is largely derived from the Advaita and the Vedic origins. In Bengal, Shakti is worshipped in the form of Kali. In South India, She is worshipped as Lakshmi and in Kashmir She is worshipped in the form of Durga.

Kashmir Shaivism

Kashmir Shaivism is a purely a monistic philosophy, which is based on the assumption that behind the whole universal existence is only one singular reality, which is identified with Shiva. This reality is absolute, infinite and pure consciousness. It is beyond and above any description, beyond recognition and speech, the faculty of mind and any mental processes, and above the intellect of human beings. It is both transcendental and immanent and can be realized by a specific process and practice, which is called Yoga. Yoga is the Hindu religious name for all forms of practices and procedures which are prescribed for the training of man to reach the realization of the divine and its recognition.

The concept of the Shiva is the sole reality of the whole universe, all space and time and is fundamentally the same concept of Vedanta Advaita, which in Vedanta is described as Brahman. He creates the whole universal existence by his immanent aspect which is called Ishvara.



Shiva and Parvati
(10th century, Kashmir)



Shiva in Black Stone
(8TH Century, Kashmir)

Shavite philoso phy identifies God as Parmashiva. Parmashiva is inherent with primordial energy, which is called Shakti. Parmashiva is not the creator, but the Shakti is the cause of all creation, while the Parmashiva wills the creation, as it is the embodiment of all will which is free and independent of all limitations. The absolutely static aspect of the Parmashiva is the Shiva in male form and the primordial energy aspect of the Parmashiva is the female form, the Shakti.

The basic assumption of Shaivsim, which forms the fundamental ground-work of the Shaivite philosophy, is that the creation is an expression of the pure consciousness and not a circumstantial combination of material conditions of the universe in time and space, as the modern science believes it is.

Like the other philosophical system of Hindu religion, the focal point of Shaivite philosophy, is the elevation of the human race from the human misery, it suffers and work out alternative ways and means for the deliverance of man from the condition he is in. Shaivism like the Vedanta and all other expressions of the Vedic philosophy identifies the cause of human misery with the ignorance of man or Jiva in respect of the nature of the creation as well as the creator, like the Brahman or Parmashiva; his own innate self as a human being; his relations with the Parmatman or the Parmashiva; the ways and means by which he can realize his being; the relation of his being with Parmatman to realize deliverance from his ignorance and therefore, his misery. In Shavite



Shiva, Parvati, and the Nandi in stone (7th century Kashmir)

philosophy, the human being can realize the knowledge of the ultimate reality as well as his real self through Shakti—the primordial energy of the Parmashiva.

Kashmir Shavism depends upon analysis, reasoning and logic and the training of man in his quest or the Yoga, as the way to achieve liberation from ignorance and places less emphasis on the ritualistic aspect of the human effort like the Yagna or sacrifice etc. It must however, be noted here that Shaivite system of Kashmir and other Shavite systems, follow the same Vedic structure of rituals and the Vedic Dharam Sutras.

The scriptural sources of Shavite philosophy, which are also known as the Shastras or the scriptures are:

(a) Agama Shastra; (b) Spanda Shastras; (c)Pratyabhijna Shastras

Agama Shastra

The Agama Shastras are the treaties and manuals, which were written between the first century and sixth century A.D. These Shaivite scriptures explain and expound upon Vedic form of rituals, mystic Yoga practices. They evolved as oral traditions, passing from the teacher to the disciple. The Agamas are classified into two sections; Agamas and Nigamas.

Agamas are treatises which are the record of the questions raised by Parvati and explanations given by Shiva. Nigamas are the record of the questions raised by Shiva himself and the answers given by Parvati.

Agamas are also called Tantras. It is believed that a large number of Tantras were expounded and recorded in treatises. But most of the Tantra treatises are lost and no longer extant. Only eighteen of the Tantras are now extant. The Tantras have been classified into three broad categories:

(a) Monistic Tantras, which are called the Bhairava Tantras;
(b) Mono-Dualist Tantras, which are called Rudra Tantras;
(c) Dualistic Tantras, which are called Shiva Tantras.

The more important Tantras are:

(i) Malinivijya Tantra;
(ii) Svacchanda Tantra;
(iii) Vijayettara Tantra;
(iv) Netra Tantra;
(v) Naishvasa Tantra;
(vi) Svambhuva Tantra;
(vii) Vijnanbhairva Tantra;
(viii) Mrgendra Tantra;
(ix) Rudrayamala Tantra;
(x) Shiv-Strotas.

Spanda Shastra

Spanda Shastras are the second set of scriptural sources of Shaivism in Kashmir. The scriptures were evolved from sixth to eleventh century A.D. Some important works of Spanda Shastra are Spandakarika and its gloss by Kallata; Vivriti written by Ramakantha; Pradipika written by Utpala Vaishneva; Spanda Samdoha and Spanda Nirnaya written by Kshemraja.

Pratyabhijna Shastra

The third set of Shaivite Shastras, the Pratyabhijna Shastra, was developed by Somananda. He wrote his treatise Shiva Drishti Shastra in the ninth century.

The whole philosophical system of Shaivism was given a final shape by Somananda in his work Ishvara Pratyabijna Shastra Sutras. An expository work on Utpaldevas's works was later composed by Kshemaraja in 1025-1075AD.The various philosophical system of Shaivism was consolidated by Laxman Acharya in his work Sharada Tilaka. His disciple Abhinavgupta integrated the system into a religious philosophy, which is generally called the Kashmir Shaivism in his monumental work Tantraloka along with several other commentaries.

The philosophy of Shaivism has five schools of Shaivite thought, which are also known as five Darshans. They are:

Trika Darshan—or the system of the triad is the exposition of Shiva, Shakti—the dynamic force and the *Jiva,* human being—their relationship, the knowledge of human being and *Sadhna*, or meditation which enables Jiva to attain liberation.

Spanda Darshan is a scientific exposition of the manifestation of the universal existence by a state of vibration in the cosmic body of Parma Shiva. According to the Spanda Darshan all material bodies including the human being are vibrations with different intensity. These vibrations are not intelligible and cannot be comprehended by the human mind.

Pratyabhijna Darshan is an exposition of the Shavite concept that since the human being is a part of the Shiva, by *Sadhna,* he is able to recognize his real original state of his being a part of the Parma Shiva.

Jaideva Singh, writes in 'Pratiyabijhrdyam', "The individual self (*Jiva*) is divine or Shiva, but he has forgotten his real nature and is identified with his psychophysical mechanism. The teaching is meant to enable him to recognize his real nature, to bring to him the truth that his real self is none other than Shiva and to suggest to him the spiritual discipline by which he can attain at one-ment with him."

Shiva Darshan or Bhairva Darshan is an exposition of the state of the universal existence which in reality is the manifestation of the Shakti of Shiva.

Krama school of Shaivism is an exposition which denies any process of time and space. Abinavagupta explains Krama system by saying that in this system there is no space. He says when one deals with forms, the space appears, but when one is established in form-less state of being, for him there is no space. In the same way when there is something to be done, then only the existence of time appears and when there is nothing to do, then time has no existence.

Kula Darshan propounds that everything in the universe is a representation of the total reality. In other words according to the Kula system microcosm represents the macrocosm. The central theme of the kula doctrine is that the Shiva is the creator of the whole universe and every- thing created merges back into Shiva. According to Kula system a human being can rise from the tatva-/elemental being to highest Shiva Tattva, the universal being.

Shaivite philosophy is basically an explanation of the liberation of man from the bondage of being a part of the creation. According to Shaivite philosophy the ultimate reality is the *Parma Shiva. Parma*

Shiva is the *Prakasha*—all light, illuminating everything. Along with *Prakasha* the *Parma Shiva* is Shiva inherent with Shakti or energy or *Vimarsha*— a quality of seeing itself. *Parma Shiva* is Shiva, and Shakti in an integrated unity. Thus Ultimate Reality as per Shiva philosophy is not only Universal Consciousness but also Universal Psychic Energy.

Parma Shiva is therefore, both divinity-transcendental trait, as well as the immanent— the existing— the imminent. Both are *Parma Shiva. Parma Shiva,* is both *Prakasha* and *Vimarsha. Prakasha* is 'I' aspect and *Vimarsha* is 'this' aspect. This vimarsha also represent absolute will (*Svatantrya*) or Shakti which is not separate from *Parma Shiva.* 'It is not content-less but it contains all that is to be'.

Shiva is the primeval power— presents in the form of Supreme Consciousness and the Shakti force— the energy which makes this whole universal existence. Shaivite philosophy is a way to;

(a) describe this primeval power;
(b) provide a realization of its supreme consciousness;
(c) describe the Shakti it creates;
(d) provide a description of the elements of this existence;
(e) provide prescriptions for the human being to recognize that he is a part of the Supreme Consciousness— but covered by layers of ignorance and therefore, not conscious of his real self.

The Shaivite philosophy grew from its origins in the Agama Shastras which are believed to have been written from first to sixth century A.D. The Spanda Shastras were composed between sixth to eleventh century A.D. The Pratyabhijna Shastra was developed by Somananda in the ninth century A.D, The whole philosophic structure of Shaivism was further perfected by Vasugupta in the ninth centuryA.D. The Spanda system was further explained by his disciple Kallatta. Further works on Spanda philosophy were written by Ramakanth, Kshemraja, Utpala, and Vaishnava. The Pratyabhijna added to the main content of Shaivism, its more sophisticated doctrines. "It is apt to say that if Kashmir Shavism is a system of thought, it is because of the rational approach of Pratyabhijna to the issues of theory and practice as expounded by Kashmir Shavism."

Pratyabhijna was developed by Somananda in the ninth century A.D. Later additions to its philosophy were made to it by Uptaladeva in 900-950A.D. The whole philosophic tradition was consolidated in a philosophic system by Laxman Acharya in his book Sharada Tieka and later on by his disciple Abhinavgupta in the eleventh century, in his study Tantra Loka.

The Shaivite philosophy is based upon a logical triad:

(i) Shiva the only reality;
(ii) Shakti the energy; and
(iii) Anu the human being.

It leads to other triads like, Pati—the God, Pasa—the bondage and Rushu the man; Shiva—the God, Shakti—the energy and Nara—the man; Para—transcendental; Parapara—the realized energy and Apara—the material; the three systems of approach Bheda—dualism; Abheda—non dualism, Bhedabheda—qualified monism. It is because of the structure of the triad, that Shaivism in Kashmir is known as Trika philosophy.

The Shaivite philosophy is structured like the other Sanskrit or the Indian religious philosophies around the following central issues:

1. The nature of God—the Shiva;
2. The creation and its nature;
3. The reason of life of the human being, its purpose, and the realization of the purpose or the libration of the man;
4. The means and methods and disciplinary practice of man to realize the purpose of life, the realization of his real self, known as Shiva Yoga.

Shiva

The core principle of Shaivism is monism: the existence of the sole reality the Shiva, of which the whole creation is the expression and the integral unity. The basis of Shaivism is in the absolute principle: "Shivoaham, Shivoaham (I am Shiva; I am Shiva)."

Bal ji Nath Pandit, notes: "Shiva is full of illumination (Prakasha), just as light makes everything visible. But it is not only Prakasha, it is Vimarsha as well. Vimarsha has been described as a part of Surveying, (Surveying itself)."

The ultimate reality according Shaivite philosophy is not only Universal Consciousness but also Universal Psychic Energy. Shiva is transcendental as well as immanent." When Shiva is Prakasha he is fountain head of all abase. He is transcendental. When he is immanent in the world, he is Vimarsha. Shiva is an active agent in the creation of this universe. He is infact, the first and final cause of the manifest world.

In Shaivism, Shiva and Shakti are only a single reality. 'Akul' and 'Kul' are two agamic terms that have often been used to denote Shiva

and Shakti. "Akul is Shiva who is synonymous with consciousness Supreme. Kul is Shakti that creates the universe. These two terms have come to non-dual Shaivism from Kaulachar that was practiced at many places in India. Their meanings have been retained by the Kashmiri thinkers. In Paratrimshika, Abhinavgupta has extensively dealt with the terms Akul and Kul, one denoting the transcendental Shiva as conscious supreme and the other as the Shakti of the consciousness tending to create."

Shaivite monism is usually confused with monotheism. Monotheism is a term which denotes the concept of one God, who is believed to create this world and is above and beyond it. Shaivite monism conceptualizes God as one and one reality, which is inherently in everything, because everything is inherent in him. The reality is both transcendental as well as active as it creates and expresses its light in all that is being. Monism is Shivoaham! "I am Shiva;" which actually means: everything is Shiva or God. In the context of monotheism, Shaivism is pantheistic and not monotheistic. Shiva is both cause and effect and their inter-relationship in terms of energy or Shakti. Shiva and Shakti are one reality: cause and creation and all that is manifest in creation are also one. Monism must be recognized in the context of a form of logical positivism which recognizes only a single reality that may express itself in its various aspects, denoting manifestly, a single unity.

The Universal Creation

According to Shavite philosophy Parma Shiva is both Prakasha and Vimarsha. Prakasha is the aspect of "I" and the Vimarsha is the aspect of "This." It is the nature of Parma Shiva to manifest by its "free will": that is what he lets out of himself as a manifestation of this world.

The Trika philosophy describes the creation of the whole existence by Shiva by the interplay of Shakti out of thirty-six elements, which in Shaivism are called Tattvas. Twenty-three tattvas are the same, which Vedanta describes. Two tattavas are modification of the Vedantic tattvas. The remaining eleven tattvas describe the fundamentals of creative forces which lead to the creation and are Shaivite.

Swami Lakshman Joo explains the tattvas or the elements and creation of the universal existence as follows:

"I will explain you the nature of that which is known as the *tattvas*, or elements.In Vedanta we are told that there are only

twenty-five tattvas; however, in Shaivism we know that there. are really thirty-six tattvas. I will give the explanation of the tattvas in the manner of rising not descending. These thirty-six tattvas are the most important points for entering into Shaivism We must rise unto Parma Shiva. I prefer rising, not descending, so we must rise. I will, therefore, explain the grossest element 'earth' first and then proceed to explain subtler and subtler elements, until we reach the subtlest element, the finest, which is Parma Shiva."

Swami Lakshman Joo continues:

"After the five mahabhutas, you move up to the five tanmatras. The five tanmatras correspond to the five mahabhutas. Gandha tanmatra arises from the element of earth (prithvi tattva).The word gandha means 'smell'; however, it is not exactly smell, it is abode of smell, where smell lives. And that abode of smell is called ganda tanmatra. The next tanmatra, rasa tanmantra, has come out from the element of water(jala mahabhuta). Rasa tanmatra is the residence of the impression of taste (rasa).And then from the element of fire (tejas mahabhuta), issues forth rupa tanmatra. Though the word rupa means form, rupa tanmatra is not exactly form; it is the residence of form, where the impression of form resides. This residence is called rupa tanmatra. From the element of air (vayu mahabhuta) rises sparsa tanmatra which is the tanmatra of touch, the sensation of touch. And finally, rising from the element of ether (akasa mahabhuta) is sabda tanmatra, the tanmatra of sound. This is the residence of the sensation of sound."

"After the five tanmatras become the five tattvas, which are known as the five Karmend-riyas, the five organs of action. These organs of action are vak, pani, pada, payu, and upastha. The first karmendriya is vak tattva, the organ of speech. Next is pani tattva. Pani is that organ of action by which you take and give. Then there is pada tattva. The word pada means 'foot'. It is the organ by which you move about. Next is payu tattva, which is action organ of excretion. It, is the organ of passing stools. The fifth and last karmendriya is upastha tattva. Upastha tattva is that karmendriya, that organ of action which is the active organ of sex and urination."

"The next five tattvas are the five organs of cognition (knowledge) and are known as the five jnanendriyas. These are

the mental organs with which we experience the world. These five organs are ghrana, rasana, caksu, tvak, and srotra.The first jnanendriya is ghrana tattva. The word ghrana means 'nose'. The use of the word nose does not refer to breathing; rather, nose is used here to indicate smell.This is the organ of cognition by which you smell. It creates odous. The next tattva is rasana tattva. Rasana means 'tongue'. Here the use of the word tongue does not refer to speech but to taste, because although speech also comes from tongue, it is an organ of action, not an organ of cognition. Rasana tattva is that organ of by which you taste. It creates flavors. Now follows caksu tattva. The word caksu means' eye'. It is that organ of cognition by which you see. It creates form (rupah). The fourth jnanendriya is tvak tattva. Tvak means 'skin'. It is the organ of cognition by which you can feel. It creates touch. The last organ of cognition is srotra tattva. Srotra means 'ear.' It is that organ of cognition by which you hear. It creates sound."

"All of the above twenty elements:—the five mahabhutas, the five tanmatras,the five karmendriyas, and the five jnanendriyas,— are called gross elements. They are all objective elements. The following elements, as we continue rising in our explanation of the tattvas, are said to be objective cum subjective elements. You should understand, though that, in Shaivism, all the elements is really objective elements. They are called objects. Only that Super Being is subjective. Yet, as following elements are a bit more connected to subjectivity than the former, we say that they are objective cum subjective elements."

"Now we rise to the three tattvas which are known as the antahkaranas. The word antah-karanas means 'internal organs'. The three internal organs are manas (mind), buddhih (intellect), and ahamkara (ego)."

After the Antakarnas, there are two other Tattvas: Prakrati and Pursha. Swami Lakshman Joo elucidates:

"These two tattvas are interdependent. Prakriti is dependent upon purusa and Purusa is dependent on prakriti. Prakriti is the element which is known as 'nature'. It is the field where the three tendencies arise and flow forth. These three tendencies are known as the three gunas, the three qualities. They are,

respectively sattva, rajas,and tamas. Prakriti is the combination of these three gunas."

Swami Ji says:

"Purusa tattva is bound and limited just as ahamkara tattva is. The only difference between purusa and ahamkara is that purusa is connected with subjectivity and ahamkara is connected with objectivity."

The purusa is connected with subjectivity and ahamkara which is connected with objectivity. And this purusa is entangled and bound in five ways, which are the five kancukas: niyati, kala, raga, vidya, and kala. These five bonds are also Tattvas. The Niyati Tattva is the bond of place. The Kala Tattva is the bond of time. The Raga Tattva is the bond of attachment. Vidya Tttva is the bond of knowledge or limited knowledge. Kala Tattva is the bond a man has of his capacity of art, creativity and talent. There is a sixth tattva among the Kancuka Tattvas. That is the tattva of Maya. Together with Maya, the Kancukas are called Sat Kancukas.

After the Sat Kancukas come the tattva of pure subjectivity. Swami Lakshman Joo says:

"Pure subjectivity is found in the tattva known as suddhavidya tattva. This exists when purusa actually realizes his own nature. And yet that realization is not stable; it is flickering, it is moving. This is the realization at the level of suddhavidya tattva.This realization is in motion. Sometimes you realize it, sometimes you forget it. And the experience (para - marsa) of suddhavidya tattva is, "I am Shiva, this universe is in duality. This universe is unreal, I am Shiva". This is the impression which comes in suddhavidya tattva and it is pure subjectivity."

Swami Ji continues:

"Now purer subjectivity will come in the next two tattvas, isvara tattva and sadasiva tattva. In isvara tattva, you realize, 'This universe is my own expansion.This universe is not illusion, it is my own expansion.' The realization which takes place in sadasiva tattva is the same as the realization which takes place in isvara tattva, but more refined. In sadasiva, you realize,' I am this whole universe.' This is the difference between these two impressions. In isvara tattva, you have the impression,' This universe is my own expansion,' where-as in sadasiva tattva, you will find, 'I myself am this

> universe.' These two tattvas comprise subjectivity in a purer form."

Swami ji elucidates the concept further and writes that after these tattavas come the two tattvas: the Shakti Tattava and the Shiva Tattava. "These two tattvas, are the interdependent tattvas; shakti tattva and shiva tattva. The impression which comes in these tattvas is only I,the pure I, the universal I. It is not 'this universe is my own expansion' or I am this whole universe.' No, it is just I, pure I, universal I. "

The last stage is that Being which does not come in the cycle of tattvas. That Being is called Parama Shiva." Parama Shiva is not only found in Shiva tattva or in Shakti tattva. It is not only here, not only there. You will find it everywhere. You will find It from the lowest tattva to the highest. It is everywhere that is why it is nowhere. The one Being who is every-where, It is nowhere."

Liberation

The human being is a part of the creation of Shiva and Shakti. He is also composed of the

(a) five Pancmahabutas;
(b) Antakarna consisting of Budhi, Ahankar, Manas, and Antakarma;
(c) Pran-Shakti, lying domant in him;
(d) Chaitanya or Shiva, which is the centre of his being.

Inherently, the self of all men, Jivas is Shiva, but the man with Shiva in him, is anu or limited, because of bondage due to impurities, the Mala. Malas are the form of impurities which conceals the Shiva in man. "In Kashmir Shaivism, Mala stands for the cosmic and individualistic limiting conditions, which hamper the free expression of spirit."

The purpose of the human life is the removal of the impurities in man, so that he realizes his real self, the self of the Shiva in him. When he realizes himself, he achieves libration.

> Swami Lakshman Joo reveals in his discourse;" In our Shiva system, there are three malas or impurities. These malas reside in maya. They do not reside in svatantantrya Shakti. Even though svatantrya shakti and maya are one, yet they are different in the sense that svatantrya shakti is that state of energy which can produce the power of going down and coming up again, both at will, whereas maya will only give you the strength of going down and not the ability of rising up

again. Once you have come down, you cannot move up again. This is the reality of the state of maya. It binds you."

Swami ji continues;"The three impurities (malas) are gross (sthula), subtle (suksma), and subtlest (para). The gross impurity is called karmamala. It is connected with actions.It is that impurity which inserts impressions, such as those which are expressed in the statements,' I am happy, I am not well, I have pain, I am a great man, I am really lucky,' in the consciousness of the individual being. This impurity of action (karmamala) is subhasubhavasana, the impress-ions of pleasure and pain. And these impressions of pleasure and pain actually remain in your individual consciousness. The next impurity is called mayiya mala. This impurity creates differentiation in one's own consciousness. It is the impurity of ignorance (avidya), the subtle impurity. The thoughts,' This house is mine, that house is not mine; This man is my friend, that man is my enemy,' are all created by mayiya mala. Mayiya mala creates duality. Mayiya mala is bhinnavedyapratha, the feeling that I and others are different. You feel that what you have is different from what others have, that some things are yours and other things are not yours. This is the impurity which makes Lord Shiva appears as many rather than as one."

Swami ji continues further; "The third impurity is called anavamala. It is the subtlest impurity. Anavamala is the particular internal impurity of the individual. Although he reaches the nearest state of the consciousness of Shiva, he has no ability to catch hold of that state. That inability is the creation of anavamala. For example, if you are conscious of your own nature and then that consciousness fades away and fades away quickly, this fading is caused by anavamala."

Swami ji says; "Anavamala is apurnata, non-fullness. It is the feeling of being incomplete. Due to this impurity, you feel incomplete in every way. Because of this feeling, you create abhilasa, the desire for completion. As you feel that you are not complete, you desire to become complete. For example, if I have the desire for some particular thing, then it means that I feel that I do not have this thing. This feeling, that you do not have this thing, is caused by anavamala. Though you feel incomplete, knowing that there is some lack in you, yet you do not know what this lack really is. You want to hold everything,

and yet no matter what you hold, you do not fill your sense of lacking, your gap. You cannot fill this lacking unless the Master points it out to you and then carries you to that point. Of these three impurities, anavamala and mayiya mala are not in action; they are only in perception, in experience. It is karma mala which is in action."

Liberation of man in Shaivism has its own meaning. Liberation means recognition (Pratyabhijna) of one's true nature. Moksha (liberation) as per Kashmir Shaivism is nothing else but the awareness of one's true nature. Liberation does not come by intellectual understanding alone which makes one to understand his true awareness. There has to be divine grace, called Anugraha or Shakti pata by which individual soul (jiva) gets liberated. To earn this divine grace one has to undergo a thorough spiritual discipline known as Upaya or Yoga. Tantric yoga involves mental cum spiritual exercises by which senses are controlled, it does not mean denial of desire (Iccha) but; either its fulfillment or detachment.

Shaivism also envisages the concept of Jeevan Mukhti; "world process starts from the pure I-consciousness of Shiva. At the level of individual that I-consciousness gets identified with its physical and psychic coverings and Jiva views world as something different than what it is. The objective of Jiva is to recapture that pure I-consciousness in which it and the universe are one. This is Jeevan Mukhti (Ascent)." (Piyaray Raina p.91)

Dr. R. K. Kaw, has worked on Pratyabhijna extensively. The 'Doctrine of Pratyabhijna' as he explains it, is the recognition by a human being of his real self being a Shiva, because he has forgotten it due to his limitations or Malas. When, by Yogic practice his veil is removed, he remembers his real self of which the essence is Shiva. "He is Shiva because he in his origin is Shiva."

At a lower stage of yogic practices an individual gets rid of Karmamala and is known as Pratayakala. At a still higher stage, he gets rid of mayiya mala and is called Vijanakala. At this stage he has *jnaan* (knowledge) *iccha* (will) but no *kriya* (action). Above this stage the experiments in successive ascent are known as *Mantras*. Mantrashvara, Mantra-maheshvara and Shiva-pramata. These are free from all *malas,* but they have varying experience of unity consciousness. It is only the Shiva-Pramata that everything appears Shiva.

"The normal jiva called 'Sakala' is bound by three malas-

karma, mayayi and anova. After psychic fervor and tries to know the whence and whither of this life. This is the first expression of the anugraha of Shiva." writes Jaideva Singh in 'Pratiyabijhrdyam', and further elaborates; "Innovation starts from the pure I-consciousness of Shiva. Evolution gets back to the same pure consciousness, but the pilgrim goes back to his home, enriched with the experience of the splendor of Shiva, he has had on the way. Veil after veil lifts and he is now poised in the heart of reality."

Swami Laxshman joo explains that this universe is three-fold and therefore, to realize the goal of realization is three-fold—has three paths *(adhvans)*; the gross path (*sthula*), subtle path (*suksma*) and subtlest path (*para*). The gross path is explained as;

(a) "The path which is said to be gross is known as bhuva-nadhva. Bhuvanadhva means 'the path of all the worlds'. In Shaivism, these worlds are said to number one hundred and eighteen. By one world, I do not mean one planet. This whole cosmos, including suns, moons, stars, and planets, is called one world. It has been found by yogins in Samadhi that there are one hundred and eighteen worlds like this cosmos which have been created. This combination of one hundred and eighteen worlds is called bhuvanadhva."

(b) The subtle path is explained as, "The complete system of the thirty-six tattvas, which I have explained earlier, is called tattvadhva. Tattvadhva means 'the course of all elements', the path of ttatvas. This is that path which is subtle."

Swami ji further explains that subtlest path is kaladhva. He reveals;" Kaladhva consists of five kalas, which are five boundaries or enclosures. These kalas are enclosures for all the thirty-six elements, the thirty-six tattvas, from earth up to Shiva. The first and outermost enclosure is called nivritti kala. In nivritti kala you will find the first tattva, prithvi tattva, the element 'earth'. The next kala or enclosure is pratistha kala, in pratistha kala you find the twenty-three tattvas from jala tattva, the element 'water', up to and including prakriti tattva. The next enclosure is known as vidya kala. Vidya kala contains the seven tattvas, from purusa tattva up to and including maya tattva. The next enclosure is called santa kala. Santa kala contains the four tattvas from suddhavidya tattva up to and including Shakti tattva, the thirty-fifth tattva. The fifth and last enclosure is known as santatita kala. Here, you will only find the existence of Shiva tattva."

He says further;"This course of the three-fold adhvans is called

vacyadhva. The word vacya means,' that which is observed, spoken, told.' So vaycyadhva is the path of that which is observed, seen, realized. It is called vacyadhva because it is seen, it is observed, it is created, and it is felt. It is the objective cycle of this creation. Now, we must turn to its observer, the creator of this adhvan. The creator of the three-fold path of the universe known as vacyadhva is called vacakadhva. The meaning of the word vacaka is,' that which observes, sees, and creates.' And, so that path which observes, sees, and creates is called vacakadhva. It is the subjective cycle of this creation. And, like vacyadhva, vacakadhva, is also composed of three paths; gross (sthula), subtle (suksma) and subtlest (para)." Swami ji continues; "Gross (suthula) vacakadhva is called padadhdhva and consists of sentences; sentences are said to be gross. Subtle (suksma) vacakadhva is called mantradhva and consists of words, because words are known to be more subtle than sentences. Subtler than mantra-dhva, the world of words is the path of letters, called varnadhva. Take any object, such as a pot. That object will fall in the three-fold world of vacyadhva. It is an offshoot of the thirty-six elements. On the other hand, the word 'pot' is vacakadhva for this object. So, this object is vacya and its vacaka is the word 'pot'.

The combination of all of these six adhvans, the three objective adhvans and the three subjective adhvans is called sadadhva, the six fold adhvans. This is the explanation of this whole universe, both subjective and objective."

Shiv Yoga

G.T.Deshpande writes in 'Abhinavagupta'; "In Shaivism there is no bifurcation of religion from philosophy. The religious aspect of it is concerned with the discipline that leads gradually to the highest stage pointed out by philosophy. The ultimate reality according to Indian thought is not a rational postulate only. It is a rational postulate as realized through discipline. The discipline is not the same for all the followers but different for each different individual at different levels."

Tantric practices are meant for achieving different stages of *Sadhana* in the spiritual path. Deshpande adds; "It is necessary to remember that in our daily prayers like *Sandhya-Vandana,* and *Devapuja*, we have both the Mantra and Tantra in them. Unless we go through certain Tantric practices, we cannot experience and realize the meaning and purpose of the Mantras whether they are from the Vedas, Puranas

or the Tantras. For example, the *Krama* system tells us that our own body is a temple (*pitha*) where all the twelve Goddesses (*Kalis*) reside. It identifies Ganesha with *prana,* Batuka with *apana* and so on."

The Shaivite tradition prescribes the disciplinary process to achieve the goal of washing away the *Malas*, impurities of ignorance, to realize the highest consciousness. The *upayas* mentioned above enjoin different approaches. In *Shambhavopaya* the aspirant, who in Shaivite terminology is called *Sadak,* trains his mind to empty his mind of all thoughts. It is known as *Icchopaya* which depends upon the *Iccha* or will to empty one's mind by meditation. This is a path of constant awareness of *Pancha –kriya*, five acts brought about by Shiva. It also involves an esoteric *Sadhana* called *Vikalpa-ksaya,* in which one has to think that universe is only a reflection of *chit*, which leads one to pure I-consciousness of Shiva. *Shaktopaya,* the aspirant or *Sadak* attains the knowledge of the self through meditation and contemplation. The idea, which transform inner forces and bring out '*Samvesha*' or the fusion of the individual consciousness with divine consciousness.

Anavopaya prescribes means in which the senses as well as mind-—-*Manas,* is used by practices such as *Pranayama, Mantra Jap.* It is generally called *Kriya Yoga* and *Jnano-paya,* because meditations as well as mental activity are resorted to bring about self-realization.The disciplinary processes or *Sadhna* practices, in Shaivism are;

(a) Pranamaya: is the breathing exercise, in which the *Sadak* while the mind is focused on a chosen deity or any object of worship.

(b) Mantra Jap: is the recitation of a divine name, word or verse, which is used in worship. Mantras are either Vedic or Tantric, which are called *Bija Mantra.*

(c) Japa: *Japa* is constant recitation of Mantra which gradually awakens the higher faculties in the *Sadak* which can unite him with Shiva.

(i) *Mala Japa*. In Mala Japa, the *Sadak* uses a rosary of 108 beads which is used in the recitation of Japa. A Japa is performed on the finger tips also.

(ii) *Yantras.* Yantras are the representation of Mantras by geometrical diagrams, which are drawn and Mantras they represent recited over them. Some of the well known Yantras are;

(iii) Sri Yantra also called Sri Chakra.

(iv) Kali Yantra
(v) Saraswati Yantra
(vi) Mrit Sanjivani Yantra
(vii) Shri Bhairwi Yantra
(viii) Nav Grah Yantra
(ix) Ganesh Yantra.

Kundalini Yoga

Swami Laxman Joo describes Kundalini yoga as another form of spiritual practice which leads to Self-realisation. He writes;

> "In our Trika Shaivism, *kundalini,* which is that internal serpent power existing in the shape of a coil, is divided in three ways. The supreme *kundalini* is called *para kundalini.*This *kundalini* is not known or experienced by yogins. It is so vast and universal that the body cannot exist in its presence. It is only experienced at the time of death. It is the heart of Shiva. This whole universe is created by *para kundalini*, exists in *para kundalini*, gets its life from *para kundalini*, and is consumed in *para kundalini*. When this *kundalini* creates the universe; Shiva conceals His Real Nature and is thrown into the universe.When the universe is created, He becomes the universe. There is no Shiva left which is separate from the universe. This is His creative energy. And when *kundalini* destroys the universe, Shiva's nature is revealed. So, the creative energy for the universe is the destructive energy for Shiva, i.e., it is the revealing energy for the universe and the concealing energy for the universe and the revealing energy for Lord Shiva. And the destructive energy for the universe is the creative energy for Shiva i.e. it is the concealing energy for the universe and revealing energy for Lord Shiva."

Para kundalini is the supreme *visarga* of Shiva. As you know from studying the theory of *matrikacakra visarga* [:] comprises two points. These points are said to be Shiva and Shakti. In the real sense, however, these points are not Shiva and Shakti; they are the revealing point and the concealing point."

Swami Laxman Joo refers to a fourth Upaya that Kashmir Shaivism refers. It is *Anupaya.* "Beyond these three *upayas; Sambhavopaya,*

saktopaya, and *anavopaya*, there is another *upaya.* Although it is not actually an *upaya,* yet it is mentioned in Kashmir Shaivism. This upaya is called *anupaya.* The word *anupaya* means 'no *upaya*'. Thoughtlessness is called *sambhavopaya.* One-pointedness is called *saktopaya.* Concentration on and with the support of *mantra* and breathing and all other elements is called *anavopaya.* Above all of these is *anupaya.* In *anupaya*, the aspirant has only to observe that nothing is to be done. Be as you are. If you are talking, go on talking. If you are sitting, go on sitting. Do not do anything; only reside in your being. This is the nature of *anupaya. Anupaya* is attributed to *ananda* Shakti of Shiva and is also called *anandopaya.*"

Bhairavas

In Vedantic tradition Bhairvas are a part of Bhutaganas and Shivaganas, which would cause obstruction in the *Yagnyas* if they were not propitiated like other Gods. In Shaivite tradition they are considered to be the embodiment of Shiva—who is vested with the power of creation, its sustenance as well as its withdrawal.In iconography Bhairavas are represented by three heads and they are called *Trishiromate* (three headed), which is a symbolic representation of the three energies— Shaktis; *Para, Parapara* and *Apara.* The *Para* is the supreme state in which there is no distinction or difference, whatever, between Shiva and Shakti. *Parapara* is that state of manifestation which is defined as identity-in-distinction i.e. there is difference within the body of Shiva but has not reached the state of independent existence. *Apara* is that state in which there is complete difference. These three heads also indicate a symbolic representation of Nara (*Jiva*), Shakti and Shiva.

In Shaivism, religion and philosophy are fused into one stream of thought. The philosophic part of Shaivism describes the universal existence and its objective, which is the rise of man to godhood. The philosophic postulates determine the religious aspect of man. The human being is an individual who is himself alone. The capability of each individual is separately assessed and course for him to follow to rise in his spiritual ascent is also marked for him alone.Shaivite monism recognizes, Shiva, his Shakti and the individual human being. Shaivism accepts that man must be liberated from his ignorance that is the third pole of the triad of the world, Shiva has created. A few verses from

Abhinavgupta's *stotras* are quoted from his Mahopadesa Vimsatikam to show the depth of the Shaivite conception of man and his creator the Shiva;

1. Salutation to you which are transcendental (*Visovottirna*) and immanent (*Visvamurti*), you ever shine with bliss and are the self with powers unlimited.
2. You are yourself and I am myself. You alone are, while I am not. And the stage where neither you are nor I am, I bow down, to that whatever that is.
3. I constantly tried to search in my heart both you and (my) soul. Neither did I find you nor my soul. And what I found it was you only.
4. Becoming your devotee, I became your form, and I found you in the form of my soul. I salute both you and me.
5. Enough with this talk of difference (between you and me). Experiencing constant relish of the bliss in your devotion (*Bhakti Rasa*), I now hesitate even to say that all this is at rest.
6. In your manifested form, I find you, me and the world; when you get merged into yourself there are neither you, nor I, nor the world.
7. You appear like an actor in all respects taking the casts of wakefulness, dream and sound sleep. As a matter of fact, you are without form.
8. In your wakeful state, the universe emerges. In your sleep lies the disappearance of the universe. The universe consisting of opposites (*sat—asat*) is filled with you alone.

A reference neeeds to be made to an early treatise, the Shiva Sutra of Vasugupta, which underline, the rudimentary basis. The Sutras are considered to be a revalation.

In Shivsutra Vimershima, it is recorded that Sage Vasugupta, the founder of Shiva philosophy of Kashmir, lived in a hermitage at Harwan, Srinagar. One night he saw Lord Shiva in a dream. He was moved by Vasugupta's helpnessness in arguing before Buddhistic scholars. To enlighten him the Lord revealed the Sutras to him and disclosed to the Sage, the existence of a rock on which the sacred Shiva Sutras were inscribed. Vasugupta was further directed to proceed to the spot early in the morning before sunrise, when by his mere touch, the rock would overturn by itself and expose Shiva Sutras to him. It is believed, that the boulder over-turned again after the inscriptions were copied by Sage Vasugupta.The huge boulder with almost a smooth surface is still known as Shankerun Pal or boulder of Lord Shiva.

Chapter IX

RITUAL CULTURE

The Hindu ritual structure of Kashmir is a part of the ritual culture of Hindu India, of course with its marginal local variants, making a part of it. "The architecture of the Hindu ritual structure of Kashmir is Sanskrit in essence and forms. The Sanskrit civilization of India grew from its Vedic beginnings, across millennia, through the era of the Upanishads and the Brahamanas and the period of the Puranas, spreading out into geographical frontiers beyond the borders of India. The Sanskrit religious culture assumed an uninterrupted continuity in its evolution from its early Vedic origins to the more elaborate ritual structure represented by the Vedic Graha-Sutras. Growing across a continent, the Sanskrit ritual culture followed a process of integration to absorb the local tradition and the cultural components of the Sanskrit civilization of India."

The ritual structure of the Hindus in Kashmir, has infact, provided the boundaries to the Hindu faith in Kashmir, which have acted as a binding force of the Hindu faith as well as a defense wall, and which has not allowed the faith to be breached, in the absence of a properly accredited religious authority as well as the absence of any imperatives against apostasy. Hindu religious culture does not have a religious authority like the organization of the Church, with clearly defined ecclesiastical power, competing with the temporal authority of the Janpads or the Indian states, as they were organized in India, ancient and medieval or the levels and lines of social control which regulated social behavior. The rituals for most of the Hindus in Kashmir is the most elaborate, the most ancient, and for most of its part, closer to the Vedic era. The Vedic Kalpa Sutra mentions of a ritual of keeping two small earthen-ware pots on the upper niche above the hearth of every

household, which were filled by the lady, before she lighted the hearth, with water and few grains of rice. The practice was followed by every household in Kashmir, till their exodus from the land of their birth in 1990. The small earthen-ware pots, were emptied of their contents, every morning and refilled with fresh water and few grains of rice before the hearth was alighted. In Kashmir, each home had a separate kitchen, earmarked for cooking in which the hearth was placed with its back to the western wall of the kitchen, so that it faced east. Over the hearth, a niche was carved in the western wall in which the two small earthen ware pots called *Sani-wari* were placed.

Infact, the structure of the rituals which the Hindus in Kashmir follow is the most elaborate of the ritual structures the various Graha Sutras enumerate."The Kashmiri Hindus generally agree to the twenty-four Sanskars, unlike their Indian counterparts who follow sixteen (*Shodasha)* Sanskars only, that cover the human life from pre-natal existence till death—the last journey. The treatises named Agni Purana, Parasar Graha Sutra, Yajanavalkya Smriti, Manu Smriti etc. all lay emphasis on Shodasha (sixteen) Sanskars except Ashulayan Graha Sutras, which lay emphasis on eleven Sanskars. Veda Kalpadrum and Vackhans Graha Sutras lay stress on thirteen and sixteen Sanskars respectively."The Hindus of Kashmir follow the adaptation of the Graha Sutras made by Laugakshi, who has laid down the Sanskars, the procedures of worship and the precept and practice of the performance of rituals for the Hindus of Kashmir. Some work on the Laugakshi adaption of this Graha Sutras has been attempted by several scholars of repute, such as Pandit Keshav Bhat, Shashi Shehkar Toshkhani and Som Nath Pandit, which has cleared the way for in-depth researches in ritual culture of Kashmir.

The rituals observed by the Hindus in Kashmir, have, like the Hindus in the rest of India, their sanction in the Dharma Shastras, which lay down the code of conduct for the Hindus in their day to day life. Dharma Shastras are traced before the Vedic times. The Dharma Shastras are believed to be written to lay down the way the Hindus lived and the duties they performed. The rituals are traditions sanctioned by Dharma. They are also enforced by the sanction of Dharma. In his discourse with Kashyapa, King Nila, puts emphasis on the rituals which the Nagas perform and which he enjoins upon the followers of Kashyapa to adopt. The affinity is closer, for whatever is written in the Nilmat Purana must be viewed in the civilizational continuum of Sanskrit religious culture of which Kashmir was a part. Kashyapa was

also a part of the same continuum. Infact, there was no Aryan invasion from outside India.

In his comprehensive study on rituals of Kashmir, Som Nath Pandit writes; "The rituals followed by the Hindus of Kashmir are classified in two broad sets: one in which are included the Sanskars, which the Hindus of Kashmir performed from their birth to death, all through their life and second the rituals they perform from day to day throughout a year. The Sanskars are grouped further into (i) Sanskars connected with birth of a child; (ii) Sanskars which follow the birth of a child till the child grows to a boy, reaches the age of *Mekhla*, the ceremony of wearing the sacred thread and in case of girl, when her *Kahnethar* ceremony is performed; (iii) Sanskars of marriage; (iv) the Sanskars which are followed the death of a person and in regard to his last rites; and (v) Sanskars , which are performed for the expiation of the dead and ancestors or manes."

Pre-Birth Sanskars

Of the twenty four Sanskars the Hindus of Kashmir observe are three Sanskars, which are performed before the birth of a child, starting from the pregnancy of a woman and its announcement in the family till the woman delivers the child. The first ritual is called *Bijwapan* or *Garbhadan* ceremony, which is performed in the third month of the pregnancy. The ritual consists of a *Yagna* during which the *Kul Guru* or the family priest purifies the pregnant woman by anointing her forehead with water, while he recites Vedic hymns. The ceremony underlines the formal announcement of the expectancy of a child in the family, the neighbourhood and friends.

Shortly after the *Bijwapan*, the second ritual is performed where the *Kul Guru,* during the process of *Yagna,* once again anoints the pregnant woman, now along with her husband with water while reciting Vedic hymns. The pregnant woman, parts her hair with two small sticks of a mulberry tree and undertakes a vow to confine herself to a safe quarter in her house and not go out in circumstances which endangers the life of her expected child. Often a Talisman, made of a piece of cloth folded in a triangular form in which a few grains of sesame and little lime powder are kept, is stitched on her headgear.

In the sixth month of the pregnancy, another ceremony the '*Dud Deun'* ceremony is performed, in which the women expecting a child goes from mother's home to her husband's home with gifts and a

bucket of milk, which is considered to be propitious and a blessings she carries with her to her home.

After the *Dud* ritual is the last pre-birth ritual, which is called *Pumsawan. Pumsawan* is a ritual performed to propitiate Agni Deva, Indra Deva and Vishnu to bless the woman with a boy. Three separate plates of cooked rice condiments, barley sesame are offered with ghee to the sacrificial fire of the *Yagna,* while recitation of hymns from the Vedas, made by the *Kul Guru.*

Birth Rituals

The birth of a child in a family, in case of Hindus of Kashmir, a joint family, remnants of which are extant, even after the exodus of the community in 1990, is an occasion of joy. The parents of the mother of the child come to their daughter's home with gifts, eatables, clothes for the mother as well as the new-born baby along with some money, which is called *Pyav* in Kashmiri. Traditionally, the delivery of the child was made in a room, and the mother and child were laid down on a grass-bed, on the lower right side of which was kept an earthen-ware pot, filled daily with all eatables. The pot was called *Hur-Lej.* The pot symbolized the guardian deity of the mother and the new born child and was called *Hur-Raza.* According to tradition, ten days, after the birth of the child, were considered impure, during which the members of the family as a whole were considered to have assumed an impure state called *Honsch.*

On the third day of the birth of baby, the ritual of *Truye* is observed, when sesame, fried and sweetened with nuts and almonds was sent by the family to the parental house of mother, who had given birth to the child, and distributed among the relatives and neighbours.

On the seventh, ninth or eleventh day after the birth, the mother and the child are given a bath in warm water in which traditional herbs were used. This ritual is called *Shran-Sunder.* The ladies of the family and the visitors, who come to greet the family, repeated the ancient Prakratised Sanskrit blessing; "*Shokh ta Punisum,*" meaning, "eternal and more birth, "wishing fertility to the mother and the family. A feast is organized on the day which begins with filling seven plates with cooked rice and other delicacies, one placed near the *Hur—Raza* pot, one given to the mother, the third placed near the new born baby and the rest distributed among the relatives. The parents of the mother of the new born baby come to their daughter's house, with a huge basket

of presents, clothes etc. which in Kashmiri called *"Fhott"* and they are welcomed at the gate of the house by the lady of the house, who performs the ritual of *Aarti* at the time, they step in, which in Kashmiri called *Aalat*.

The main birth ritual is called the *"Kahanethar"* of the new-born child and is performed at any time after the birth of the child. On the *Kahanether* occasion, a *Yagna* is performed according to Vedic injunctions. A golden or silver ring tied by *Narivan* thread, which the Hindus allover use as a wrist band, is worn round his neck amidst chanting of Vedic hymns while ghee, almonds, lotus seeds, and other condiments called *"Agna-Vater"*—-the articles to be offered to *Agni* in the *Yagna,* is put in the screed fire of the *Agni,* in the *Agni-Kund,* the square shaped enclosure of clay, in which *Yagna* fire is lighted.

The *Kahanethar* ritual is followed by the *Namkarn* ritual or giving a name to the new born child. The name of the baby is selected according to the *Rashi* of the child—literally corresponding to the specific time of the birth and the constellation of stars obtaining at that time. A *Yagna* is held, in which Vedic hymns are recited after which the *Kul-Guru* having chosen the name, gives it to the child after sprinkling water over the father, the mother and other relatives present.

A practice of celebrating a month's completion after birth of the child was celebrated till very recently, a few decades before the exodus of the Hindus from Kashmir. A round *Mandala* of various colours—called *Uuyug* was laid down on the floor of the threshold of the house, the new-born child, dressed in clothes was placed on it and besides it was placed a pestle on a grass band woven into a small round plait. The plait personified the bride if the child was a boy and a groom, if the child was a girl. The ritual was called *Massa-Nethar*. The ritual, was also called *"Siriya—Darshan*—seeing the Sun God", and appears to have lingered on as a ritual of early Vedic times among the Hindus of Kashmir.

On the fortieth day of the birth of the child, the mother as well as the child is given a bath. The water for the bath is boiled for a longer period and is known as *Phot-Wonye—-Phot* signifying the birth and *Wonye* signifying water.

When the new born child attains the six to seven months or more, it is administered some soft vegetarian food, particularly pudding prepared in milk, on an auspicious day and the ritual is called *Anaprash* and in Kashmiri language *Op-Chop*. The ritual is observed by performing *Yagna* to which the pudding in a plate is first offered as a sacrifice

and rest is kept before the child to take. The whole process is carried on while the *Kul-Guru* recites hymns from the Vedas and other scriptures as per *Puja-Paditi*—the procedure of worship, prescribed for each ritual.

Exactly a year after the birth of the child, his birthday is celebrated with considerable gaiety and gusto. The *Kul-Guru* presides over the birthday celebrations, for which he performs worship. The *Kul-Guru* puts the vermillion mark on the forehead of the child and ties a *Narivan* red coloured band of threads round his wrist. Just at that time, a young girl, who is given a plate of rice on which a little of salt and some money is placed, with which she touches the right shoulder of the child whose birthday is celebrated. This ritual is called *Zang* in Kashmiri. The contents of the plate are later handed to the *Kul-Guru* with reverence. The procedure of the ritual the way the *Kul-Guru* performs is laid down in the specific *Puja-Paditi* pertaining to the celebration of the birthdays.

The first hair dressing, usually a tonsure that a new born male child gets among the Hindus, is an important occasion and a ritualistic procedure to celebrate it, is as old as the Athar Veda. Among the rituals after the birth observed by the Hindus in Kashmir, the first hair dressing known in Kashmiri language as the *Zara-Kaasai*, is important. As usual, the most important part of the ritual is the holding of *Yagna,* in which the *Agna-Vatur*, dry fruits, sugar candy, sesame and the other ingredients of the *Havan Samaghri* are offered amidst the chanting of Vedic hymns. Then the Kul-Guru begins the ritual of *Zara-Kaasai*—-the dressing of the hair. Two earthen-ware saucers, in Kashmiri language called the *Toak,* are placed before the *Kul-Guru*. In one of the saucers is placed some water and in the other some walnuts, which are called *Zara Dooni*. The *Kul-Guru* begins the tonsure by cutting a tuft of hair by a blade of *Darab* grass, known as *Kush* grass, which is considered be sacred. Then the hair dressing is handed over to a professional barber, who gives the boy a hair dressing. The barber is given rice, salt and money, as a first offering which is called *Zang*. He is however, given a satisfactory payment along with a piece of cloth, required for hair cutting and in many cases, cloth for a shirt and a trouser. The shaven hair along with the walnuts in the *Toak* are taken out and dug in earth of an orchard or a garden, with the nuts often germinating in a walnut sapling which is later transplanted at a place, where it grows into a walnut tree. The *Zara-Kaasai* function is accompanied by feasting in which relatives and neighbours partake,

The rituals, the *Yagna*, the sacrificial fire, and the other rituals held on the different occasions are usually accompanied by reciting of

hymns in Kashmiri language, in a given metere, which has been still maintained perhaps, over millennia, in Kashmir. The recitation of the hymns is called *Wanavun* and is performed by the ladies of the house, along with those invited to attend the function, at the place where various auspicious rituals are performed. The recitation of the Kashmiri hymns by the ladies, who are provided an enclosure, furnished properly for sitting down, where the ladies assemble and led by an elderly lady, recite the devotional hymns in the form of *Wanavun*. All the hymns are devotional in content, and invoke the blessings of Ganesha, Indra, Surya, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and Mother Goddess, in her nine forms, Durga, Rajini, Sharika, Jwala, Mahakali, Uma or Sati, Parvati, the other Devtas and Rishis for the child, or the bride or groom for whom the ritual ceremony is performed. There is a reason to believe that the ladies recited Vedic *Richas* as well as hymns in ancient times, which were during the millennia, Prakritised to form the hymns in the Kashmiri language as they are recited now. The opening words are still the old Sanskrit terms, partly Prakritised, like the "*Henzay*" and "*Skuklam*" with which every *Wachun*—hymn begins.

Mekhala

The Mekhala Sanskar or initiating a child to wear the sacred thread, also called Yagnyopavita Sanskar and Upanayan Sanskar, is the most sacred and the most important of the Sanskars of the Hindus of Kashmir. In Kashmiri language it is also called "*Yoni* Sanskar", as the sacred thread in Kashmiri language, is invariably called *Yoni*.

The Sanskar is accompanied by a variety of social functions, which precede, or follow the main rituals connected with the Mekhala or initiation to wear the sacred thread. The function start with the process of collecting various articles, firewood, clothes, utensils, *Agna-Samghri* or *Agna-Vater*—the ingredients which are offered to the holy fire, at the *Yagna* performed for different rituals, *Agna-Samghri,* the requirements for *Yagna* on an auspicious time and day. It is followed by another auspicious social function, like the cleaning of house called *Levun,* and then inviting relations, the neighbours and other acquaintances called in Kashmiri language *Dapun*, the construction of the kitchen in the compound of the house, called in Kashmiri, the *Vura.*

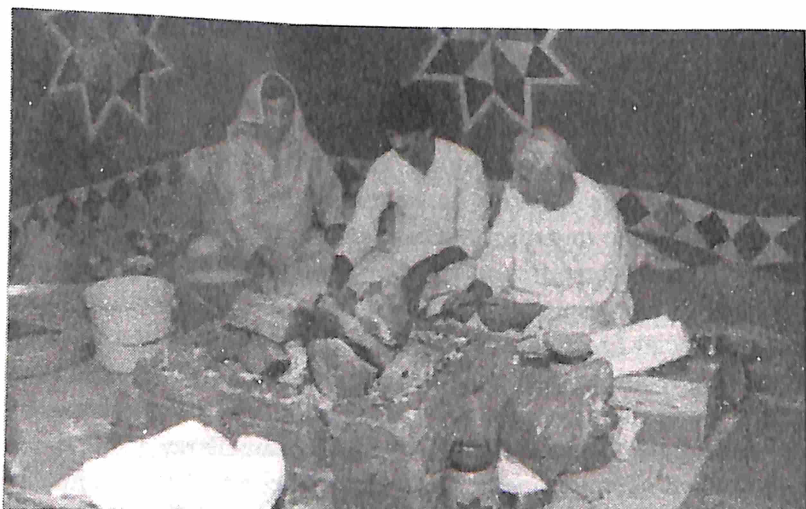
The main ceremony with the social gathering of the relatives and neighbourers, called Mahandi-Raat—*Manzirat* in Kashmiri, which indicates the formal beginning of the Mekhala ceremony. The evening is

devoted to application of *Maanz*—Henna to the boy whose Mekhala Sanskar is to be performed followed by the adornment of Henna—*Maanz* to every relative and others who are invited to be present on the occasion amidst, the *Wanvun* of hymns by the ladies, who are present on the occasion. Those who are present partake in the feast, which the parents of the boy offered in the evening called the *Mazirat,* after which *Wanvun*, singing and dancing follows.

The actual ritual Sanskar of Mekhala begins with *Devgon*, in which the boy, who is to be initiated to wear the sacred thread, is given a holy bath according to the instructions of the *Kul-Guru* and then carried to the place, where the sacrificial fire is lit for *Yagna,* which the *Kul-Guru* performs as preparatory to the ritual of the Mekhala, scheduled to follow a day or so after the *Devgon.*

The Mekhala ritual is a very elaborate combine of a number of rituals which symbolize, various stages of the education of the child: his admission into Gurukul, the stages of his education, his duty of collecting *Biksha* for his Gurukul, the ancient schools the *Rishis* ran, to impart education to the children of the community, and the completion of his education.

Quite interestingly, the first ritual of the sacramental bath given to the child, whose Yagnyopavita is to be performed, is recorded in the Sutras, as the Kanya Sanskar, which in Kashmiri is called *Kani-Shran.* The ceremony of *Devgon* is mainly devoted to the purification of the child as witnessed by Devas, whose presence is invoked on the occasion.



Mekhala Yagna in Progress

The *Yagna* which is performed after the *Kani-Shran* is performed according to the format, the Laugakshi adaptation of the Grah Sutras, prescribes. The *Kalsha* is laid out as usual. But below the *Kalsha*, the *Kul-Guru* lays out a geometrical diagram, on which seven balls of cooked rice are placed which are called *Devichi-Gulye* along with a little of *Ver,* a form of saltish pudding prepared by Hindus in Kashmir on every occasion a Sanskar is performed, cooked vegetable known in Kashmir as *Haand,* Dandelion in English, curds, milk and ghee (purified butter). The seven balls are placed on the diagram for seven deities, whose presence is invoked on the occasion. The deities are the Lakshmi; Maheshwari or Parvati; Kumari representing *Panch-Kanya;* Vaishnavi or Durga; Varahi, the spouse of the Boar incarnation of Vishnu; Narsimhi or Chamanda and Indrani the spouse of Indra Deva. It is only after these deities, the representation of the Mother Goddess, are worshipped, that the Yagna sacrificial fire is lit and *Yagna* of the *Devgon* is commenced.

The Mekhala ritual, which follows a day or so after, is also a elaborate combine of rituals, which are symbolic of the various stages in the education of a child from his admission to a school, the Gurukul as it was known in ancient times, to his initiation to learning; his duty of collecting *Biksha*—alms, for his Gurukul, and the other procedures in the completion of his education.



Abeed Ceremony

The boy whose Mekhala is to be performed is dressed in a yellow robe and a yellow cap, with a deer skin hung around his waist. Then he symbolically performs the various stages of his leaning, collects *Biksha*—or alms, which in Kashmiri is called *Abeed* and to which everybody contributes, while kissing the forehead of the boy and blessing him. The sacred thread is put round the neck of the boy by the *Kul-Guru* as well as his parents. A visit to the river-side follows where the boy goes with the *Kul-Guru* to have a bath and change his mendicant yellow clothes.

The next day after the Mekhala, the concluding ritual of *Koshal-Hom* is performed. A *Homa*—a *Yagna* is performed, which is a form of expressing gratitude by the parents and other relatives of the boy, who's Mekhala, has been performed, to the Gods and Devas, who are invited to participate in the Mekhala ritual.

On all the social celebrations and the performance of religious rituals pertaining to *Devgon* or the Mekhala or the sacred thread ceremony, the *Wanvun* continues to be a regular feature, with the verses or the *Wachuns*, which are relevant to and connected with each social function and religious ritual recited by the women-folk, who are invited to attend the various social functions, the *Devgon* and the Mekhala religious ritual. Each *Wachun* of the *Wanvun*, is in content an incantation to invite the blessings of Ganesha, Brahma, Vishnu—Vishnu's incarnations, Indra, the Devas and the *Rishis,* the Mother Goddess in all her forms, the deities. Uma-Sati and Parvati, Indrani, the spouse of Indra, Lakshmi and Saraswati and Ganga, in a staggering format of fine Kashmiri vocabulary, each word appearing to have been picked and chosen to suit the rhythm of the *Wachun* and its content.

Marriage Ritual

The institution of marriage among the Hindus of Kashmir is a sacrament, like it is for the Hindus of India, with its sanction in the Dharma Shastras which gives the institution of the marriage of Hindus in India. The sacrament of marriage as it is envisaged by the Vedic Kalpa-Sutras, the Grah-Sutras and the Dharma-Sutras, is indissoluble, irreversible, not subject to any conditions. The obligations arising out of it are uniformly binding on the community of Hindus as a whole. The Laugahshi adaption of the Kalpa-Sutras, Grah-Sutras and the Dharma-Sutras, for the Hindus of Kashmir, does not alter the content of the rituals in any respect, whatsoever.

The rituals pertaining to marriage commence with the social functions of making preparations for the marriage of the son or daughter, after the match has been fixed and the reconciliation of the *Grhahas*—the star constellations of the boy and the girl on the basis of their *Tekni* and the horoscope is established. The social functions, which precede the marriage rituals begin with cleansing of the house on an auspicious day and proceed on to include inviting relations and other people known as *Dapun,* to the dressing of the hair in case of a girl, decorating the door and the walls around, it known as *Krul-Kharun.* Then the most important of the social function the *Maziraat* follows, when the grooms or brides hands and feet are dyed with *Mahandi* or Henna, which is accompanied by a major event of feasting, *Wanvun* and singing.

The religious ritual the groom and his family and relations actually commence with the visit of *Kul-Guru* of the bride to the home of the groom, to give them a formal invitation, written on a decorated paper in Sanskrit language written in Sharda script, to come to the brides home with the groom along with guests to solemnize the *Lagan* or the marriage ceremony of the groom and the bride. The *Kul-Guru* of the bride's side is received at the door with the performance of *Aarti* by the lady of the house, which in Kashmiri language is called *Aalat* and led to a furnished room, where the parents and the relatives welcome him with reverence. A variety of sweets, specially prepared cakes, dry fruits are spread out before the *Kul-Guru*, who performs *Puja* as per procedure laid down by the scriptures; picks a part of the delicacies to pack them to take away with him leaving the rest for the bride's parents and relatives as *Naveed* or *Prasad.*

The second important ritual performed at the home of the groom and the bride is the *Devgon* ceremony, which is performed as the *Devgon* ceremony, already described above in the rituals of Mekhala. It is performed in two stages; the Kanya Sanskar called in Kashmiri the *Kani-Shran* and the *Yagna* which follows. The *Yagna* for the bride is more elaborate, involving longer recitation of Vedic hymns and offering more ghee, *Agna-Vater* and barley-rice known as *Arga* and flowers to the sacrificial fire.

The Lagan ritual is performed after the groom arrives with guests, his parents and other relatives, at the time it is fixed to be performed. After having been received, the bridegroom is led to a place where a round *Mandala* diagram of colours is laid out on the ground which is

called *Vueyg*. As he steps upon it, the bride is brought to step on the *Vueyg* to stand on the left side of the groom, both facing east. The lady of the house performs *Aarti,* in Kashmiri language *Aalath* to invoke blessing of the Gods in welcoming the groom. From the *Vueyg* the bride and the groom are led to the door of the house where the *Lagan* is to be performed. At the door, the *Kul-Gurus* of the groom and the bride perform *Duvar Puja*—a ritual common among the Hindus of performing Puja of the entrance door of their homes, considered to be sacred abodes.

The marriage ritual—the *Lagan*, is performed at the auspicious time fixed for the occasion. The local practices of presenting dry fruits, giving gifts to the uncles of the grooms, bringing a young girl representing the river Ganga and a young boy, to perform local practices, the main *Lagan* ritual, follows the Laugakshi adoption of the *Lagan* rituals of the Grah-Sutras. The rituals begin with *Kanay-Dan*; wherein the father of the bride offers her to the groom, amidst chanting of the Vedic hymns, before the *Yagna* fire. While the father of the bride, offers her to the groom, who receives her in his hands, both the groom and the bride make three promises:

Dharmay Cha: for performing the acts of Dharma;
Arthay Cha: for material and economic prosperity;
Kamay Cha: for the sake of sensual pleasures."



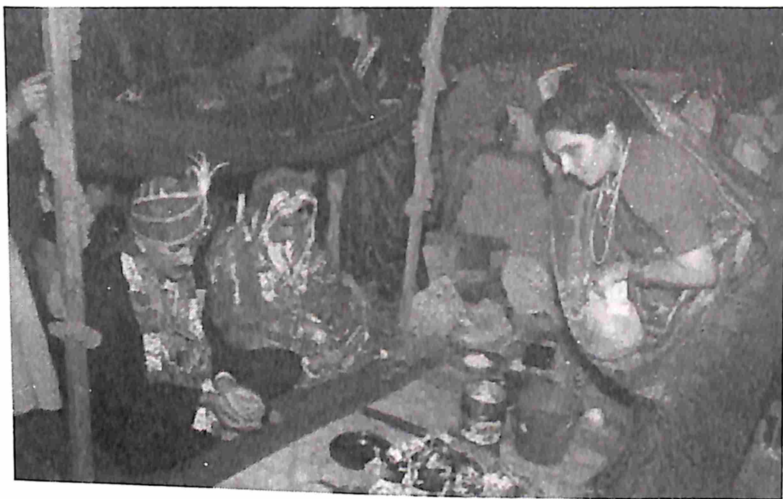
Newly married couple seeking blessings from elders

After the *Kanya-Dan*, the father of the bride adorns the groom with the sacred thread. The second important stage in the marriage ritual is the *Sapt-Padi*. Pandita explains the *Sapt-Padi* as follows: "According to the Indian of marriage, after completing the *Kanya-Dan* ceremony, the bride's and the groom's outer garments are knotted together and they are asked to circumambulate to the Holy Fire seven times and this leaving her original *Kula* or *Gotra*, she enters into the *Gotra*/family of the groom after making seven vows. In Kashmir the function is performed in a different manner. Here the bride is asked to walk over seven coins and thus leave her parental *Kula* or family caste and enter and adopt the `*Kula/Gotra* of the husband's family. All these are arranged by the father of the groom to the north-west of the Holy Fire in such a way that the bride can take her steps on them very easily. The seven steps towards the north are mentioned in the Grah-Sutras as making seven promises. It is also stated that the bride would walk seven steps and each step contains a promise, which is binding on both parties.

These are

1. For the sensual enjoyment you be *Ek-Padi,* like a one legged person, slow cautious;
2. For the field of wisdom and thought you behave like *Deve-Padi*, like a human being;
3. For increasing the number of family members you be like a *Tri-Padi,* cunning a heeding;
4. For comfort you be *Chathush-Padi,* hard working like a beast;
5. For the household animals you behave like *Panch-Padi,* i.e. complete uniformity like Panch-Mahabutas.
6. For the household cores you be *Shat-Padi*, to work with all parts of body.
7. For a companion like me, the groom, you behave as a *Safta-Padi*, i.e, perfect harmony like the seven tunes of music."

An important ritual among the Hindus of Kashmir is the *Posh-Puza*; The bride and the groom are considered to be the embodiment of Shiva and Shakti and all the relatives of the bride, men and women, collect at the place where the *Lagan* ceremony is being solemnized, to worship them as they shower flower petals over them. Before the *Puja* starts, a red brocade sheet is spread over the bride and groom, who sit on the right side of the bride and the brides relations shower flower petals on the brocade amidst the recitation of scriptural incantation prescribed for the purpose.



Posh-Puza

After the *Posh-Puza*, the social and traditional practices follow till the time of the departure of the bride with the groom arrives. The bride and the groom leave along with the groom's father and relatives for their home, where they are received after customary practices. Shortly after, having changed their bridal attire and groom's dress, they repair back to the bride's parent's home, where they are received with customary *Aalat*. After having some eatables, the bride and the groom are sent back to their home, with pots of curds, bags of salt and variety of utensils called *Satraat* and other gifts.

Funerary Rites

The Hindus of Kashmir, follow almost identical rituals and practices in the disposal of their dead and observance of mourning as the Hindus of India do. They also burn their dead, infants being an exception who are buried in a separate enclose reserved for that purpose in all cremation grounds in Kashmir. Since the funerary rights are not susceptible to be tampered with, the funerary rites followed by the Hindus have been preserved more or less in their pristine simplicity and the prescribed rituals laid down in the *Karma-Kanda,* adaption of Laugakshi is retained without much tempering. The main funerary rights are the lighting of the sacrificial fire at a platform to perform the *Yagna*, associated with the last rites. The Vedic hymns and other

Mantras are recited from the scriptures, as the dead body is given a bath, wrapped in a white robe like sheath with cap, placed on a wooden bier and then picked-up on the shoulders to be carried to the cremation ground. A part of the sacrificial fire is carried along with the body. At the cremation ground, the *Kul-Guru*, who accompanies the bier, lays down a diagram on which the wooden pyre is raised, while reciting Vedic hymns. The pier is lit by the sons of the deceased person, amidst chanting of the Vedic hymns. A day or two later, the ashes of the dead are collected and immersed at the Prayag at Shadipur in the waters of Vitasta, or kept in state, and later taken to be immersed in Ganga at Haridwar. Before the exodus, some people immersed the ashes of their dead in Harmukat Ganga lake, situated high in the sub-Himalayan mountain ranges in the north of Kashmir.

The mourning continues till the tenth day, when a *Shradha* ceremony is held along a riverside in presence of relatives and other mourners assembled there. The eleventh day after the death, a *Shradha* ceremony is held for the dead to be followed by a concluding *Shradha* ceremony on the twelfth day. On the thirteenth day, the mourning comes to an end.

For the first three months after the demise, a fortnightly *Shradha* is performed for the expiation of the dead. After that monthly *Shradha* is performed, with a *Shradha* after six months, which is called *Shadmos.* After a year a *Shradha* is performed which is known as *Waharvar.* Thereafter, a *Shradha* is performed for the deceased every year on the day of his death, like other manes.

Other Rituals

There is a set of other rituals, which the Hindus of Kashmir perform, some of which are remnants of the rituals, which have their origin in the proto-Aryan beginnings of the Vedic Age, or the early Rig Vedic era or even earlier than that. These pertain to religious rituals performed daily from morning till the evening, weekly, fortnightly, monthly and over a year. An interesting feature of these rituals is the primary place given to the commemoration of their ancestors, almost reminiscent of commitment of pre-historic peoples of India and the people who lived to the east of India to ancestor worship.

Of the daily rituals that is a separate set of rituals for men and a separate set of rituals for women. Early in the morning, the Hindus after having their ablutions, performed *Sandhya*, the worship of Gods of

which a single standard practice was performed, usually on the banks of a river, where Hindu temple was situated and offer *Tarpan*—a handful of water for their ancestors, their fathers, mothers and forefathers and in order not to leave out any ancestor using the blanket term, "*Samast Mata-Pita*" meaning all the ancestors, Gurus or teachers, even relatives. In the evening at the time of the sunset known among the Hindus in Kashmir as *Sandhya-Kaal,* men performed the ritual *Sandhya* or headed for the temples to hold the evening worship followed by *Aarti.*

For women, the first ritual after she had taken a wash was to clean the steps leading to the main door of the house, called *Brandh*, among the Hindus of Kashmir and known as *Brandh-Levun* or *Brandh-Faash.* It was followed by refilling of the *Sani-Waries,* the two small earthen-ware pots kept on a niche on the western wall of the kitchen near the hearth, which in case of every Kashmiri Hindu home faced the east. At the time of *Sandhya–Kaal*, the women lighted an earthen lamp, which they kept on the window sill for some time. Women usually cautioned their children to sit-up at the time of the *Sandhya-Kaal,* awake and in attention as a part of their religious obligation.

In weekly rituals are preparing yellow rice by using turmeric called *Teher* on Tuesdays or Saturdays, a ritual, a remnant of proto-Aryan culture, and feed it to birds and distribute its handfuls among the family members even to neighbours. Among the Hindus like the Hindus in India, there is a division on the basis of their belonging to those who follow the solar calendar and those who follow the lunar calendar, though in Kashmir, the Hindus follow the Sapt-Rishi calendar based upon an ingeniously integrated Luni-Solar calendar, which is based upon a very intricate intercalary adjustment of the part of the days, days and even month. This usually causes a difference of a day in observation of some monthly and yearly rituals. The Hindus observe a fast on the *Ashtami* and or on *Ekadashi* of every fortnight, a practice, which everyone is free to observe or not to observe.

A study of Mahatmayas reveals that the observation of rituals has undergone change, most probably due to rise of the Muslims to power in the middle of the fourteenth century and the continuation of the Muslim rule till the beginning of the nineteenth century, a period which proved cataclysmic for the Hindu religious culture and caused the Hindus and their ritual culture severe damage.

The Hindus persisted with the observation of the main Sanskars and a host of daily and yearly rituals, most of which were observed in

their homes. Of the rituals which have survived, some of them are of greater antiquity and others, which were observed in Kashmir in the later Puranic era, during the Nilmat period of the history of Kashmir and the post-Nilmat Hindu period of the history of Kashmir.

Dharma Shastras

The code of conduct, to regulate individual as well as intra-community relationships, the observance of the rituals and the sanctions which impose restrictions on any breach in the code of conduct, are the most essential part of the Hindu religious culture. The code of conduct in the Hindu religious culture is laid down in elaborate detail in the various scriptures of the Hindu religion, which are generally classified as the Smritis or the explanations and versions of the scriptures complied by Rishis, which are not presumed to be utterances of Gods or expressions of divinity such as Shruties are. These compilations are known as the Dharma Shastras. They are considered to enshrine the codes of conduct, the sanctions, in certain cases even the forms of the certain essential rituals, the precepts as well as precedents which constitute the basic structure of the Hindu laws, and the sets of sanctions along with remedies against any violations. "The Dharma Shastras are texts in Hinduism that are concerned with the legal precedent of law that is in relation to Dharma. Dharma as it relates to Dharma Shastras acts as a guide to what Hindu must do in their life to fulfill their Dharmic duty. In relation to religious texts for Hindus the Dharma Shastras are considered Smiriti (all texts containing tradition) and not Sruti (divinely heard or from the Gods) an example of these are the Vedas. As the Dharma Shastras are Smriti, which are human authorship, they are not as revered as are main texts of the Hindu religion."

The Dharma Shastras evolved over millennia, right from the Vedic ages and were perhaps, codified and put in written form in between the first century AD. in case of Manu, possibly in the second century AD. To what an extent where the different geographical regions of the Sanskrit people, including those of Kashmir involved in their evolution is yet to be ascertained. It is however clear, that the Hindus of Kashmir accept Dharma Shastras and their code of conduct as the other Hindus in India.

Dharma Shastras are a composite of the compilations of the Smirities compiled by several authors among whom the main compilations are those of such authors as Manu, Yajnavalka, Parasara, Katyana and Narada. The compilations of Smritis deal with subjects; Acara, Prayischita, Vyavahara and Raj Dharma. Manu's Smriti deals with all these subjects. Yajnavalka's Smiriti deals with only three subjects Acara, Prayascita and Vyavahara. The most important part of the Dharma Shastras is that relating to law, the personal law of Hindus, as it is called now. The code envisaged by the Dharma Shastras with regard to Vyavahara has actually given rise to two schools of personal law; the Mitaksara and Dayabagha. Mitaksara is accepted by the whole of India except Bengal, where the Hindus follow the Dayabagha school. "The Dharma Shastras are books that help with everyday life for every Hindu and are needed to ensure that their *Dharmic* duties are fulfilled. These texts are needed for Hindu culture because they make up what a Hindu does, showing them how in their lives they can attain their ultimate Dharmic goal, eventually through living a life of *Dharma* and attaining *Moksha,* libration from worldly state."

The Hindus of Kashmir, follow the theological imperatives, the Dharma Shastras lay down as the other Hindus in India do. They accept, like the Hindus of India, except Bengal, the Mitakshra school of law, in which are included several customary precepts and practices, which are local to them.

INDEX

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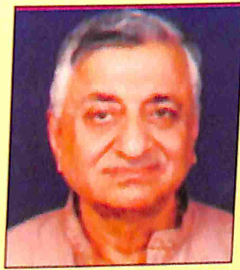
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Chaman Lal Gadoo, an engineer by profession, was born in Srinagar, Kashmir. He is a social activist and a prolific writer. Politically, Gadoo is an ardent supporter of Hindu nationalism. While deeply involved in the Hindu resistance movement against Muslim separatism in Kashmir, Gadoo has been in the midst of the relief and rehabilitation of the Hindus of Kashmir, displaced due to the aftermath of the militant violence in Kashmir. He worked diligently for the Kashmiri cause, first as the President of Kashmiri Samiti, Delhi (nodal agency for displaced Kashmiri Hindus) and then President, BJP, J&K cell, Delhi Pradesh, for more than two decades. He has been President of J&K Sangam, Vice-President of All India Kashmiri Samaj and is associated with many other organizations. He has been raising issues faced by displaced persons before National Human Rights Commission, for last fifteen years, and also before Standing Parliamentary Committee on Rehabilitation of J&K Migrants during 2007. Gadoo has widely traveled and represented Kashmiri Hindus at many national and international foras. He has authored several books and was associated with the drafting of the 'White Paper on Kashmir' which was published by Joint Human Rights Committee, in Delhi in 1996.

Among the monographs Gadoo has written, are: *White Paper on Kashmir, Kashmir-Militancy and Human Rights, Human Rights Violations in Kashmir, Human Rights Violations in Jammu and Kashmir, Kashmir-Greater Autonomy, Terrorism and Human Rights Violations in Jammu and Kashmir, Census of India 2001-Kashmir and Religious Demography, Kashmir-The Bitter Truth, Sri Ram Temple Movement, Temples of Kashmir, Kashmir-Hindu Shrines*

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